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FAMILY WALLS--A COSTLY INHERITANCE:
THE IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES IN THE
FICTION OF MAVIS GALLANT

by

J. GAIL SOWERBY, R.N., B.A. (Hons.)

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

May 1, 1987

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ISBN 0-315-39411-0

The undersigned recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
and Research acceptance of the thesis

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES IN THE
FICTION OF MAVIS GALLANT"

submitted by J. Gail Sowerby, R.N. & B.A. (Hons.)
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Thesis Supervisor

Chairman, Department of English

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August 4, 1987

ABSTRACT

In thorough analyses of selected representative stories, this thesis outlines Mavis Gallant's preoccupation with how contexts--individual circumstances, family settings, social and political networks--merge with and reflect one another. The "eye" of Gallant's stories shows, over and over again, that the family is a rigid and stultifying structure, maintained by its members to stabilize patterns of response that they find familiar and comfortable. The family, generally portrayed as patriarchal and oppressive, constructs a picture of "reality" consistent with the values and prejudices of its most powerful member. (That this oppressor is shown also to be constructed by the oppressive institutions within the environment is indicative of the strength of Gallant's vision and her refusal to oversimplify her perspective.) The consequence of successfully "institutionalizing" individuals is a loss of freedom: that is, the incapacity of any character to act spontaneously in awareness of actual circumstances and events immediately around her. Lost, too, is the ability to think back (or forward) without the distortion of the internalized "model" of the world that oppressive orders impose on an individual. Thus, both memory and imagination atrophy.

Chapter I introduces and defines the specific perspectives that run through Gallant's work and examines other critical

analyses of her fiction. Chapter II focuses in general on Gallant's earlier stories (1950s) in which she creates a protagonist who demonstrates how family and social structures create barriers to true perception, sensation, and reaction for the individual. Chapter III examines stories that feature family relationships which Gallant demonstrates are self-serving, complicitous and destructive of individuality. Chapter IV focuses on what have been popularly dubbed Gallant's political stories, where Gallant shows social and political institutions to be amplifications and reflections of the oppressive family structure. Chapter V analyzes two series of stories which introduce Gallant's concepts of successful individual revolution and offer some interesting perspectives on the process of writing fiction. Gallant is consistently ironic and her stance does not change in her latest stories, but there is a gradually developing articulation of an ambiguous feminine principle that defies established structures and offers--fleetinglly, at least--the potential of freedom.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To:

Denis Sampson, for intelligent arguments and encouragement;
Brian Parsons, for invaluable editing skills and unflagging
confidence;

Larry McDonald, for incisive criticism and, above all,
inestimable patience.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The Other Paris

OP

Green Water, Green Sky

GWGS

My Heart is Broken

MHB

A Fairly Good Time

FGT

The Pegnitz Junction

PJ

The End of the World and Other Stories

EW

From the Fifteenth District

FFD

Home Truths

HT

Overhead in a Balloon

OB

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CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKS OF MAVIS GALLANT

In 1950, having published four short stories in Canadian periodicals, Mavis Gallant left her job as a feature writer on the Montreal Standard. She was twenty-eight years old and eager to "make a living by writing" in Europe (Hancock 28). For over thirty-five years she has been doing just this; however, critical acclaim in Canada has gradually developed only over the past decade, prompting new releases of her collected fiction.

In 1951, Gallant published a story, "Madeline's Birthday," in The New Yorker for the first time; she has continued to publish almost all her short fiction in this magazine. Many of these stories have since been collected in seven volumes. She has also published two novels: the first, Green Water, Green Sky, was printed serially in The New Yorker (June-August 1959); the second is entitled A Fairly Good Time (1970). Both novels were favorably reviewed, but neither has received the acclaim of her shorter fiction. A play, What is to be Done?, performed in Toronto in 1982, drew a mixed response there and in its Montreal production. Gallant is also well known as an incisive recorder of political events, and has published many non-fiction articles for The New Yorker, Atlantic Monthly, and Harper's Magazine. Her journal on the student riots in Paris, 1968, "Reflections: The Events in May: A Paris Notebook I & II" (September 1968), and an

essay on Gabriel Russier, "Annals of Justice," published in The New Yorker in 1971, have lately been reprinted in a volume of selected essays, Paris Notebooks: Essays and Reviews (1986). Gallant has also been working on a biographical analysis of Dreyfus for some six years; it is not yet published.

The fiction of Mavis Gallant shows a preoccupation with Europe during and in the two decades following World War II. Both her novels take this setting, as well as the majority of her short stories. Gallant's fiction emphasizes setting: particular nations, borders, military posts, specific historical situations, such as the expulsion of Jews from Italy in the 1930s or the post-War Allied occupation of Austria. The settings are meticulously detailed and, far from simply providing an incidental background, these conditions constitute the real drama of her stories. This examination of Gallant's fiction will demonstrate that the characters' individual conflicts reflect and merge with political realities.

Gallant denies she writes from any organized vision of life, ideological or philosophical, but frankly acknowledges her stories to be political (Hancock 41). In May 1983, in an interview in Le Devoir, she outlines the responsibilities of the writer:

Les seules responsabilités de l'écrivain sont envers lui-même: écrire avec qualité, garder les yeux ouverts, ne jamais embellir la société mais plutôt la décapier.

Je ne peux pas m'imaginer écrire dans la vide, dans la vague.

On the purpose of modern fiction, she elaborates:

Je ne sais pas si je réussis toujours. Je ne crois pas qu'on doive embellir son époque mais j'essaie de la raconter. Je ne voudrais pas paraître prétentieuse en disant cela mais tout ce que j'ai écrit avait pour moi un contenu sociologique ou politique.

The neurotic idiosyncrasies that Gallant's characters exhibit, then, are threads that make up a tapestry of a particular social setting. Gallant's characters are creatures of their social and historical context: their personal myths reflect and become one with social trends and political movements. In this sense, the public and domestic realms are metaphors for one another in Gallant: the warped autocracy of a post-War German family is mirrored by the nation's mindless adherence to a set of rigid rules ("An Alien Flower," October 1972). Likewise the French middle class, confused by events which have rendered obsolete traditional measures of status, moral values and economic "givens," is represented by one family, the Maurels, pretending they can refurbish what is hopelessly shabby; they are a family sustained by incest, superstition, resentment and guilt (A Fairly Good Time, 1970).

Gallant specifically identifies this sociological or political context in her collection of German stories, The Pegnitz Junction (1973). The stories stem from a Standards assignment: Gallant was asked to write explanatory captions for the first published photos of Jews in the Nazi concentration camps:

Now, imagine being twenty-two, being the intensely political romantic I was, passionately anti-Fascist, having believed that a new kind of civilization was going to grow out of the ruins of the war--out of victory over Fascism--and having to write the explanation of something I did not myself understand. . . .

What I wrote and thought at twenty-two I think and believe now. . . . [W]e had to find out from the Germans themselves what had gone wrong. . . . The victims, the survivors that is, could tell us what happened to them, but not why. The why was desperately important to people like myself who were twenty-two and had to live with this shambles.

I never lost interest in what had happened, the why of it, I mean. . . . The colonial wars of the fifties and sixties proved that civilization was no barrier anywhere. I had the feeling that in every day living I would find the origin of the worm--the worm that had destroyed the structure. . . . [The Pegnitz Junction is] not a book about Fascism, but a book about where

Fascism came from. That is why I like it better than anything else. Because I finally answered my own question. Not the historical causes of Fascism--just its small possibilities in people. (Hancock 39, 40, 41)

This thesis will demonstrate that Gallant's fiction, consistent with her statement in Le Devoir, involves not only psychological analyses of characters, not only historical analyses of specific societies, but also analyses of individuals and societies studied in reference to one another. In other words, the personal and domestic structures Gallant satirizes in her stories are metaphors for the social and political structures that make up the characters' setting. The importance of this relationship has not been recognized by most critics, and thus Gallant's purpose and achievement not fully appreciated.

Until recently, in fact, there has been little meaty criticism of Gallant's work. Most early critiques of her fiction are in the form of book reviews and focus on style rather than theme. Most critics label Gallant "a New Yorker writer," but the implications of this typecasting are ambiguous. Where one reviewer laments her modish New Yorker style in Green Water, Green Sky (London Times Literary Supplement 77), another notes how refreshing it is to find in the magazine a work that has "none of the worst features of The New Yorker fiction, modish smoothness or disguised sentimentality" (Jennings 273). In the ten or so reviews published after the release of Green Water, Green Sky, the most pointed issue raised by the critics concerns

Gallant's skill in characterization: one critic writes that her characters are "silly," that they are simply examples of neurosis in exile (London Times 77); another adds that they are just "cleverly arranged mannequins in shop windows" (Price 278).

Another critic awkwardly agrees that Gallant's style overshadows her characterization: "Gallant's literary skill, which is considerable, comes through in her first novel with more impact than emotional substance" (McManus 41). These early reviewers raise relevant and worthwhile questions about Gallant's characters--but they end their analyses by judging the author's lack of sympathy for her characters rather than articulating the ideas that Gallant's characters represent.

More recent Canadian criticism of Gallant's fiction takes in not only her novels, but her more considerable achievement, her short stories. Robert Weaver was one of the first publishers and critics of Gallant's writing in this country. In his introduction to the 1974 edition of selected stories, The End of the World and Other Stories, Weaver offers a biography of Gallant and a brief evaluation of the importance of her fiction (7-13). He notes that her work focuses on alienation, and suggests that this is an expression of Gallant's expatriate status. Gallant's non-fiction, he says, corroborates this:

[Her writing] is influenced by the fact she is an outsider: her diary [on student revolution in Paris, 1968] gives the reader the impression that after twenty years of living with them, she looks on Frenchmen of all

ages and classes with a cool eye. The diary is the personal record of a political incident written by someone who finds politics distasteful: "I loathe slogans; I hate shouting." (Weaver 10)

Weaver is off the mark here. Surely most writers of fiction or non-fiction observe and record what they see as outsiders; surely alienation is a common preoccupation--arguably the most common--of writers over the past fifty years; surely Gallant, writing from an objective stance, points out that what is distasteful is not politics *per se*, but the irrational language and incongruous, pointless behavior that too often is experienced as "political Incident."

Weaver does not say he finds Gallant's characters to be shallow, only that Gallant is "subtle in her exploration of character" (8). He is more insightful when he points out that her "curiosity about social detail" forms a background for her characters, typically "fragmented by life, so often expatriated in one way or another" (12).

Douglas Malcolm, author of a thesis about Gallant's fiction in 1975, also perceives Gallant's primary concern to be characters struggling with alienation. Malcolm states that Gallant's work, like that of other existentialists, is "founded upon the premise that all men are spiritual exiles" (32). The last four chapters of his thesis trace four different stages of alienation in Gallant's characters: first, protagonists who have

no perception that their reality is in conflict with reality as presented by the author; second, protagonists who feel isolated because their perception of reality is at odds with reality, as presented by the author, but who are unaware that their perceptions are invalid; third, protagonists who become aware, albeit momentarily, that reality and what they have attributed to reality are not in accord; finally, protagonists who become aware of the dichotomy between perceived reality and actuality and who then incorporate this conflict which, Malcolm states, "is inevitably transmogrified into a concept of internal reality that is associated with either death or madness" (34). In other words, once characters do realize that what they believed to be real is not, they acknowledge and express the conflict by destroying themselves or going mad.

More often than not, Gallant's characters do misperceive "external reality"--that is, the author's presentation of reality demonstrates the characters' perceptions to be wrong. According to Malcolm, however, the characters' poor perception of reality is entirely responsible for their sense of isolation. Only when he discusses the fourth stage (in which he analyzes The Pegnitz Junction) does he hint that, indeed, reality here--a fragmented and chaotic social setting--is also an isolating force (115, 116, 119). In fact, Malcolm states The Pegnitz Junction is a departure from Gallant's earlier fiction because it is the one work where the author's presentation of the world is as chaotic as her characters' perception of reality (112, 119). Gallant suggests, of course, that accurate perception of an irrational,

destructive society--certainly the society she paints in The Pegnitz Junction--will not resolve the characters' isolation from one another or within themselves. Malcolm is helpful in pointing out that Gallant believes imposing a false order on reality leads to alienation from the world and from oneself. He misses, however, that an individual's alienation has social and political implications in Gallant's works.

Grazia Merler offers an interesting summary of Gallant's works in her book Mavis Gallant: Narrative Patterns and Devices (1978). She classifies Gallant's stories according to narrative devices, narrative voices, and plot patterns. Her analysis of the stories in the latter category is the most significant contribution to criticism of Gallant's fiction. Merler finds the adult-child relationship to be the most common in both Gallant's stories and novels (26). She implies that these relationships always involve some abuse of power, and further, that they are ambiguous: she notes "shifting movements," referring, we assume, to childhood as a sometimes negative, sometimes positive force in Gallant's fiction (2, 23). She traces the child-adult conflict through twenty-six stories and the novel Green Water, Green Sky, and further states that seven stories about families also belong in this category, since they and other stories like "In the Tunnel" (September 1971), involving a slave-master relationship, are "extensions of" this category (54-55). Merler's comprehensive classification maps are useful in helping us recognize patterns in the relationships Gallant creates--the role of the mediator in marriages, for example, or the role of the

child-victim. However, Merler's most explicit insight about Gallant's purpose is that the author tries to uncover sham in order to show us that relationships are ambiguous (24). Her analysis of plot patterns should lead her beyond this self-evident observation, but she fails to remark upon the interplay of relationships between individuals and within families, and relationships involving institutions, classes and states.

Robertson Davies also emphasizes the fragmented characters in Gallant's stories (69). Davies, too, denies the contention of initial reviewers that Gallant's characterization is superficial; rather, he points out that Gallant has exaggerated the shallows and hollows of the human mind (70). Not only do Gallant's characters, caught in grotesque situations, lack awareness and the ability to communicate, but any sincere will to achieve these things. In identifying their indolence, Davies touches on a central element of Gallant's characters, common to all her stories (70). But Davies undercuts his appreciation of Gallant's stories by saying they are stories of miserable women. "[They] love unworthy men, but . . . are [themselves in some way] difficult to love. . . . They are women who never have any of those strokes of luck which illuminate the lives of even very unlikely people" (32). To call her fiction stories of miserable women is to do Gallant a disservice. Gender, in Davies' sense, is not significant: Gallant's males are as wretched as her females. Furthermore, Davies' call for luck seems to refute his acknowledgment that Gallant's world is grotesque (72). However

fleeting or blunted the characters' awareness may be, suggesting good luck as a resolution is simplistic and arbitrary.

George Woodcock offers a weightier criticism of Gallant when he examines sixteen of her short stories, dividing them into three groups according to terrain and theme. The stories he selects are written as much as eighteen years apart. Woodcock suggests that their primary subject is "English-speaking foreigners . . . uneasily resident in Europe" (76). Further typical of all her work, Woodcock states, is that memory is a most "potent factor"; memory of the past is always there to extend the boundaries of the existing setting in Gallant's fiction (75-76). Woodcock's most important insight--one Davies leaves unexpressed--is that Gallant makes us "aware of the past that has brought us to this particular eddy in time, and we even have an inkling of how the future might flow on out of the eddy" (77). Woodcock notes, then, Gallant's imaginative reconstructions of contexts--of scenes developing out of earlier scenes, together melding into future ones. Although events in the present may appear to be episodic or fragmented, they are in fact designed by the fabric of events that have already happened. This is fiction of "enhanced reality, [where] life is reshaped by artifice," Woodcock insists (77), and he further states that this fiction is not primarily symbolic, but that what happens in these stories, and not what is suggested, is most meaningful. He illustrates his analysis with the story, "In the Tunnel"; the tunnel of this story is a long, narrow, windowless room where the protagonist finds herself living with a lover who hates anything

flawed or ugly, and who rejects her when she accidentally injures herself and limps around on a swollen ankle. The tunnel, Woodcock shows, is "the physical setting and in part the physical cause of what happens. . . . [I]n afterthought, rather than intention, it can be seen as a figure suggesting the tunnel of self-repetition . . ." (78). Woodcock is aware, then, that setting in Gallant is not strictly symbolic; it bears a literal and causal relationship to events in her fiction. This thesis will explore this idea as developed throughout Gallant's stories.

Woodcock also examines Gallant's treatment of memory, "important both as method and content" (82). He traces its presence in her earliest work, in two later collections of her fiction, in The Pegnitz Junction, and finally in the recent autobiographical Linnet Muir series collected in Home Truths. Woodcock concludes that the stories in The Pegnitz Junction are different from all her previous writing in that she abandons the approach through reminiscence she used in her earlier stories to write about and through people whose memories have atrophied, who have "drawn blinds over the past" (82). Woodcock is right, but like Douglas Malcolm who makes the same point, his insight is limited: the atrophied memory and myopia that belong to the figures in The Pegnitz Junction mark an evolution in Gallant's view, not a departure from it.

Woodcock is a fine analyst of Gallant's style and ironic tone, and goes further than any other critic yet cited in examining themes common to her fiction. But in setting The

Pegnitz Junction apart from her other stories and suggesting that her work, in general, is not political--"it is too easy to lay too much stress on the social-historical nature of [her later] stories" (91)--he stops short of considering what he himself has pointed out as essential to analyzing Gallant: what the stories "actually contain," and how these circumstances are significant in the context of the past and future.

Ronald Hatch, in an article called "The Three Stages of Mavis Gallant's Short Fiction," proves an insightful analyst of Gallant's artistic purpose and the stories that embody it. Hatch, like Woodcock, divides Gallant's work into three categories to study it (92). Unlike Woodcock, however, Hatch sees a thematic continuity running through these three divisions, pointing out that Gallant's focus is not characterization, but setting. Characters in Gallant's stories are "immersed in incident" and this results in what Hatch calls a "historical fiction," where the principal actors are themselves the forces of history (92). He first cites two stories, "The Other Paris" and "Malcolm and Bea," in which he traces Gallant's interest in the individual's conception of ideals and disappointment in how surroundings measure up to the ideals. Both romance and history play a part in these stories, Hatch says: individuals search for a middle-class notion of "romance" which ignores historical truths like racism, exploitation, and economic depression. Gallant's point of view, Hatch notes, is not romantic; the individual is not seen as a noble, pathetic figure, "standing alone," but is rather "part of all he sees" (93).

Any sustained reading of Gallant soon reveals that her main interest is not the individual's problems in their own right [as a romantic writer's would be], but the manner in which liberal ideology has spawned a nightmare of history. (93)

Hatch does not illustrate, but he clearly identifies Gallant's focus to be socio-political and he carries this insight through into his discussion of her later stories.

Hatch also recognizes the script-like quality of Gallant's prose. Her characters are often seen in cinematic sequences, as though in search of a role in a script (97-98). The script they search for is the one written around middle-class, liberal, rationalized ideals; and this script dictates their goals and choices. But in the face of reality, which Gallant shows never conforms to the ideal script, her characters are left speechless, isolated, confused and ever less willing to perceive reality.

The second stage in Gallant's writing, Hatch believes, is defined by The Pegnitz Junction. Here, he writes:

Gallant's theme is still middle-class enervation; but now the stories reveal how enervation leads not just to the destruction of an individual but to the participation of an entire people in a monstrous coloration. . . . [Now t]he entire nation, not just a few individuals, suffer from lack of plot. (101)

The individuals Gallant presents in The Pegnitz Junction stories are to be seen as creatures of their context--the Fascist movement in Germany. The decaying structure is clearly demonstrated, Hatch shows, in the spatial images of characters in the title story who take a train journey over which they have no control. Although there are frequent detours and diversions for uncertain reasons, the passengers seem mildly disoriented rather than distressed: they seem to expect this kind of disorientation. "One person's lifelessness," Hatch points out, was the focus of Gallant's early stories: now, in The Pegnitz Junction, "there is the sinister feeling of a whole nation involved in capitulation to a dead state of mind--and yet at the same time alive with destructive forces" (101).

Hatch judges the third stage in Gallant's fiction to be slightly more optimistic. In this category he cites "Irina" (December 1974), collected in From the Fifteenth District, as well as the Linnet Muir stories (1975-1978), collected in Home Truths. The theme here is the individual's attempt at revolution against false convention, Hatch insists; the protagonists attempt to depose "abstract moral codes" and deal with circumstances and context as it is immediately experienced. Hatch suggests, then, as this thesis will argue, that Gallant's preoccupation with Fascism evolves from her recognition of how psychological, social and political contexts mirror one another. Hatch sees the Linnet Muir sequence as stories in which the writer traces an individual's growing awareness about her surroundings (108). On a search for truth in her childhood city, Linnet becomes aware

that Montreal is a city of suppression and deceit where her questions will remain unanswered. Hatch points out that, though less sinister than The Pegnitz Junction, these later stories still emphasize the dangers of men's tendency to rationalize and create false order rather than live in uncertainty.

Of all the critics prior to 1980, Hatch most effectively analyzes the political dimension of Gallant's work: he sees Gallant reminding us that the past creates the future and has most power over those who try to avoid it (103, 110). Thus the divorce of characters from their "real" context has not only psychological implications (alienation), but social and political import as well. Indeed, Hatch writes that in Gallant's work it is difficult to know where the psychological leaves off and the political begins (102). But even if the concepts are truly distinct--a moot point--neither is seen to "leave off" or "begin" in Gallant's fiction. The psychological and the political, like the past, present and future, are each embedded one within the other.

The year 1978 provided fairly prolific, if short-sighted, criticism of Gallant's fiction. In the early 1980s critical interest in Gallant's work has increased, though too often the focus of the literary analyst is Gallant's biography or literary style. The final chapter of this thesis was near completion when two articles by Janice Kulyk-Keefer became available. Though these articles have not informed this thesis, Kulyk-Keefer's insights are pertinent to the ideas put forth here. In "Strange

Fashions of Forsaking: Criticism and the Fiction of Mavis Gallant," Kulyk-Keefer comments that critics have mistaken Gallant's thematic purposes by concentrating on her stylistic devices, which, Kulyk-Keefer clearly feels, misrepresents Gallant's "fictive world" (722). In the same essay, she outlines important areas that Gallant's writing explores: "the world of women and that collective memory of shattering events we own as history" (722).

In a later essay, "Mavis Gallant and the Angel of History," Kulyk-Keefer develops both these ideas more fully. First, she suggests that, for Gallant, the domestic is a metaphor of the public, political, social or historical world (289). Second, she states that history in Gallant's fiction is "lived experience" (289); in other words, Gallant traces historical events in the every-day living of characters who have survived it (287-288). Kulyk-Keefer realizes, as have other critics such as Hatch and Woodcock, that a character's memory may function as a true and redemptive force, or--more commonly--a falsifying and destructive one (290). Finally, Kulyk-Keefer comments that Gallant caricatures woman's historical position within the family (and, it follows) in all social structures: that of victim, trapped by circumstances--though she is quick to point out that these female victims are also capable of being perpetrators of oppressive myths (294-295). She also articulates an idea which is implicit throughout this thesis:

[F]emale experience, in which passivity, captive and sometimes complicit suffering have been traditionally the norm, becomes archetypal of the human experience of history in an age in which "total war" has eclipsed all other concepts of conflict. . . . (296)

The four chapters that follow confirm Kulyk-Keefer's view. This thesis demonstrates that the patriarchal structures typical of the middle classes in post-War societies--and the middle classes are Gallant's special preoccupation--have created a mythology (a system of ideals, beliefs, values, laws) that for most people overrides reality. Individuals thus systematized--and Gallant shows the educational institutions and the media as efficient mass propagandists in this respect--are consequently particularly susceptible to the tendency to falsify experience, to distort memory. Kulyk-Keefer identifies "female experience" here as archetypal of victimization; this thesis will show that, though this is true, Gallant also suggests that it is feminine experience--experience outside or in defiance of patriarchal structures--that constitutes a seedbed for revolution and the potential for freedom, for independence.

CHAPTER II

INTERNAL BARRIERS TO AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE: THE INDIVIDUAL

Gallant has been writing short stories since 1950. The thematic focus of her fiction has gradually broadened, though not shifted. This focus principally involves barriers which, once constructed in an individual's mind, keep her from engaging in authentic or "real" experience. Real experience for Gallant exists only in the realm where possibility is not limited by propriety, where an individual's choices are not restricted to those that social authorities or institutions condone. This realm, Gallant suggests, is difficult to find, even for those who actively search. She further suggests that all social structures--especially the family, the fundamental social structure--erect barriers to free choice in order to maintain stability within themselves.

The stories to be discussed in this chapter were for the most part published early in Gallant's career. They are stories that emphasize the internal obstacles which thwart an individual's search for something authentic. Generally, the protagonist in these stories is naive and childish, waiting for something "real" to happen to her. More often than not, Gallant does not present us with this picture of "real" experience; we infer its existence from the ironic contrast the characters' lives set up.

Everything--even conversation--seemed so much in the future that I couldn't get my feet on the ground and start living. It seemed to me it had been that way all my life. . . . ("Autumn Day," OP 37)

It seemed to me I had waited years for life to begin. . . . ("Its Image on the Mirror," MHB 63).

Her real life was beginning now and she never doubted its meaning. ("Four Seasons," FFD 5)

It was a busy life, yet Carol could not help feeling that something had been missed. ("The Other Paris," OP 6)

Typically, this character owns a set of illusions and ideals that constitute a personal mythology. The myths are contemporary ones, however; the storybook they issue from has been concocted by the voices of middle-class liberalism. Sterilized versions of love and marriage go hand in hand in these stories; likewise victory in war means freedom, justice, and international understanding.

The character programmed to search for these oversimple, trite, "idealized" plots in reality is bound to disappointment, Gallant indicates. This character is also poorly equipped to perceive what the author presents as external reality, or the implications of "real" situations. For example, the economic

consequences of World War II for Western European countries are incomprehensible to Carol who believes:

[T]he idea that one might not be permitted to work was preposterous. She harbored a rigid belief that anyone could work who sincerely wanted to. Picking apples, she thought vaguely, or down in a mine, where people are always needed. ("The Other Paris," OP 24)

Gallant suggests that so strong are these institutions--so powerful are their structures--that individuals in modern society have their perceptions already constructed according to these models.

Clichés from the media about love; a college course's aphorisms about marriage; a husband's list of rules about what is proper conduct for his wife; an older sister's warnings about nutrition, or what to look for in a wife; superstitions or rituals passed from parents to children: all of these constitute equivalent authorities for Gallant's protagonists. These structures, each positing a moral, a message, a scene, or a script are internalized by Gallant's naive characters and obstruct their search for something "real." As a result, even when Gallant's characters are confronted by reality, they do not recognize it; or, recognizing it momentarily, they reject it absolutely.

Reality does not merely disappoint Gallant's protagonists: it threatens to "deconstruct" them. They are creatures of social structures--the family, the education system, the church, the media, the institutions of modern commerce and technology. The characters have internalized the values and visions of these structures. When experiences in reality collide with the "real" experience that these characters search for, the characters--in order to maintain their internal structure--deny the confrontation, overrule the contradiction. Ultimately there is only a glancing collision, from which they emerge "unscathed" by reality. Believers in popular middle-class myths, they are hopeful that their expectations (validated by the authorities who established them and selected them) will be realized. They find freedom unfit to their pragmatic desires, unstable, uncomfortable, even unbearable.

In the end, these characters restructure their "real" experience to be in accord with what their internal structure told them they would find: they settle for "accuracy" instead of truth. Gallant explicitly shows the two to be different: she indicates that characters rewrite the script using the same words but distort feeling and implication, the meaning of events. "She would forget the rain and her unshared confusion and loneliness, and remember instead the Paris of films, . . . and there would be, at last, a coherent picture, accurate but untrue" ("The Other Paris," OP 30).

This search for true experience often figures, in these early stories, as a search for true love. But love should not be mistaken as the focus of these stories; it is a metaphor for the spontaneous vital experience that the characters have not encountered within their society. Furthermore, this search is played out within the context of cultural collisions--middle class versus peasant, Modern American versus Post-War European, for example. Gallant is preoccupied by what happens to perception in the human mind when one's value system is thrust into a context which denies it. Gallant is attentive to the social and political details that constitute these contexts, and such historical forces should be considered important "characters" in her stories in their own right.

In "The Other Paris" (April 1953) the protagonist is twenty-two year old Carol, who arrives in Paris seven years after the end of the War to work as a secretary for a government agency. Under the illusion that in a short time she will be so old that no one will ask her, Carol accepts a marriage proposal from Howard, an economist she has known for only three weeks (OP 3). Carol's illusions about her relationship and about Paris are circumscribed by the middle-class conventions that she has designated to be her authorities.

The fact that Carol was not in love with Howard Mitchell did not dismay her in the least. From a series of helpful college lectures on marriage she had learned that a common interest, such as a liking for Irish

setters, was the true basis for happiness, and that the illusion of love was a blight imposed by the film industry, and almost entirely responsible for the high rate of divorce. Similar economic backgrounds, financial security, belonging to the same church--these were the pillars of the married union. (OP 3-4)

So, Carol "set about the *business* of falling in love" (emphasis added; OP 4). This business requires finding the conditions in Paris in which real love can take root. Carol believes a certain setting to be essential to love: "[she] rated the chances of love in a cottage or furnished room at zero" (OP 4). Since her authorities (songs, movies, etc.) have deemed Paris a romantic city, Carol is confident. But the city she envisions is not easily found:

The weather continued unimproved. She shared an apartment in Passy with two American girls, a temporary ménage that might have existed anywhere. When she rode the Métro, people pushed and were just as rude as in New York. Restaurant food was dull, and the cafés were full of Coca-Cola signs. No wonder she was not in love, she would think. Where was the Paris she had read about? (OP 6)

Carol believes that this Paris can make the image she has of herself, in love in Paris, come true, and her "romance" with

Howard, réal. Leaving her office, she looks through the windows, thinking:

[A] special kind of evening was forming all over the city, and . . . she had no part in it. . . . [S]he believed [the Parisians] knew a secret, and if she spoke to the right person, or opened the right door, or turned down an unexpected street, the city would reveal itself and she would fall in love. (OP 8-9)

Carol is persistent in her quest for "the other Paris," nearly to the point of farce.

She hunted up odd cheap restaurants. She made [Howard] walk in the rain. She said that they ought to see the sun come up from the stairs of the Sacré-Coeur. . . . [I]t was a rainy dawn and a suspicious gendarme sent them both home. (OP 11)

On Christmas Eve, Carol persuades Howard to attend a concert in Place Vendôme, picturing sweet-voiced children, starlight, snow. Instead, it rains, and the choir, testing sound levels, repeats the same phrase over and over again. Howard catches a cold that lasts all winter, and Carol "put the question of falling in love to one side. Paris was not the place. . . . It did not occur to her to break her engagement" (OP 13).

Gallant uses Carol's Parisian co-worker, Odile, to show us that Carol's ~~E~~xpectations of Paris are unrealistic. Odile draws for us a picture of the real post-War Paris:

"Before the war, we travelled. . . . Now, with our poor little franc, everything is finished. I work to help my family. My brother publicizes wines--Spanish wines. We work and work so that our parents won't feel the change, and so that [our sister] can study music." (OP 8)

Odile and her boyfriend, Felix, function to demonstrate the cultural collision that temporarily confuses Carol. Felix, an Austrian, is in Paris without papers, so is unable to work. He does "other things" which Odile does not specify, but which the author implies involve the black market (OP 10). Carol is made uneasy by Felix: at first, on the sexual level; later her discomfiture is caused by the kind of experience he stands for. Carol realizes that although they were the same age during the war, "where she had had a holiday, Felix's parents had been killed" (OP 10).

In fact, Felix represents "the other Paris," but in an ironic way. Felix enters the story exactly at one of the moments Carol is looking wistfully over Paris from her office window. At first, vaguely aware that Felix constitutes "authenticity," "otherness," Carol is drawn toward him. But when she realizes he threatens her stability--her authorities' voices--on both a sexual and intellectual level, she becomes hostile. This

ambivalence about Felix parallels her confusion about Paris: she is exasperated by her own conflicting perceptions.

Odile's family did not accept Felix; Carol had barely absorbed this thought, which gave her an unexpected and indignant shock, when she realized what he had meant by "us foreigners." It was rude of Odile to let her family hurt her friend; at the same time, it was even less kind of them to include Carol in a single category of foreigners. Surely Odile could see the difference between Carol and this pale young man who "did other things." She felt that she and Felix had been linked together in a disagreeable way, and that she was floating away from everything familiar and safe. . . .

"Odile!" Carol cried. "Odile must be crazy. What is she thinking of? Her family ought to put a stop to it. . . . Why, he'll never marry her! Why should he? He's only a boy, an orphan. He needs friends, and connections, and somebody his own age. Why should he marry Odile? What does he want with an old maid from a broken down family? He needs a good meal, and--and help." She stopped, bewildered. She had been about to say "and love." (OP 19-20)

Her next words, wailed, are "I want to go home." We know better than Howard--Carol does not mean her Passy apartment (OP 20).

Eventually, through Felix, Carol does reach "the other Paris." Odile leads her to Felix's apartment, through a part of Paris Carol does not recognize--"not pretty, not picturesque." In Felix's apartment, she is embarrassed by signs of "real living" (laundry on the chair, belongings on the floor), and by the physical naturalness of Odile and Felix--by his kiss on Odile's hand, by his oblique reference to Odile's ability to sleep soundly. "The thought that they might be in love entered her head . . . and it made her ill" (OP 25). Carol has been searching for the Paris where true love can flourish. Betrayed by the post-War Paris she sees every day, she is suddenly confronted by Paris, where true love does exist. Ironically, she feels sick: made dizzy, we assume, by the sudden threat to her illusions about both true love and Paris. Having succeeded in her quest, she now feels ashamed of the way she had searched for the real Paris: "This was all it had come to, this dirty room. Howard was right, she thought. It doesn't pay" (OP 25).

For a moment, she tries to resolve the cultural conflict by convincing Felix to conform to her set of conventions.

"You could go to America. . . . You could work," she said sharply. . . . But she could not see clearly the picture of Felix and Odile combining their salaries in a neat little apartment and faithfully remitting a portion to France. She could not imagine what on earth Felix would do for a living. (OP 27-28)

Felix ridicules her, gently, and then himself. "Odile is right. I ought to have been killed. . . . As for Odile, her whole family is overdue" (OP 28). Thus Felix indicates that the reality of Paris as it exists now confuses or confounds even the Parisians, who suffer their own illusions about themselves and their city.

So Carol finds "the other Paris," and rejects it:

For a moment . . . she felt that she had at last opened the right door, turned down the right street, glimpsed the vision toward which she had struggled on winter evenings when, standing on the staircase, she had wanted to be enchanted with Paris and to be in love with Howard.

But that such a vision could come from Felix and Odile was impossible. (OP 29)

It is not possible for Carol to accept this vision of "the other Paris" because to do so would destroy the visions that are so entrenched in her mind. Like all Gallant characters, Carol shows a tendency to make imagination reinforce the value system that is familiar and keeps her inner structure intact. To transcend these values is dangerous, risky: it involves the destruction of ideals and images that Carol has identified her "self" with. And this destruction of ideals is unthinkable to Gallant characters: it would mean sacrificing predictable and familiar circumstances for unknown risks. To a systematized mind, in which value

structures that stress economic stability and social propriety have been entrenched, change means chaos.

Thus, Carol will only accept experience when it matches the scenes set forth by her middle-class value system. She refashions experience--action, event, and feeling--if reality contradicts or seriously threatens to prove false her system of images or ideals. Her glimpse into "the other Paris" is a missed epiphany--a fleeting glimpse that does not lead her to any sustained insight. What insight there is, is momentary; what is more, Gallant's characters are not even graced with disillusionment. No permanent or lasting change takes place in either their behavior or attitude. Indeed, although Carol is momentarily "disillusioned" or disgusted by "the other Paris," eventually she reconstructs her perceptions about the particular event:

She paid for the violets and noticed as she did so that the little scene--accepting the flowers, paying for them--had the gentle, nostalgic air of something past. Soon, she sensed, the comforting vision of Paris as she had once imagined it would overlap the reality. To have met and married Howard there would sound romantic and interesting, more and more so as time passed. . . . [T]here would be, at last, a coherent picture, accurate but untrue. . . . [M]ercifully removed in time, she would remember it and describe it and finally believe it as it had never been at all. (OP 29-30)

We see here the difference between the truth and accuracy. It is possible for the human mind to remember events accurately, while at the same time concoct a frame around these events--a frame of feelings, perceptions, sensations--so as to enshrine a false vision of experience.

Gallant shows Carol to be comforted by this process. Rather than have her sense of herself and her future threatened by a kind of experience that would disturb it, she can depend on her memory to superimpose on the actual events of her stay in Paris the images of herself, of the city, of her marriage to Howard, as she would have had them be. The Paris of her vision will survive the post-War Paris of the devalued franc and demoralized Parisians; her image of romance need not be threatened by Felix's love amidst squalor in a tawdry flat. Instead, the mind's tendency to conform to convention will allow Carol to disengage from both personal and cultural collision, value system intact, romantic ideals unshaken, prejudices sound, self-image unaltered.

In "Autumn Day" (October 1955), Gallant again focuses on a childish figure who finds her illusions challenged by forces beyond her comprehension. Cissy is nineteen and married a year to Walt; she has seen him so seldom that their marriage has not really begun until she meets him in Salzburg, Austria, where he is stationed with the post-War occupation forces.

Cissy dresses like a child and, motherless, has always depended on her older sister to take care of her. "I had always

been the baby . . . ; even my wedding seemed a kind of game. . . . Now they were pushing me out" (OP 30). She marries Walt because he is her brother-in-law's cousin, and she hopes to have a marriage like her older sister's (OP 31).

Again typical of Gallant characters, and reminiscent of Carol buying violets in "The Other Paris," Cissy is more interested in being a spectator--in viewing the images of herself--than in creating her own events.

[T]he whole idea of arriving to meet a soldier somewhere seemed touching and brave and romantic. When Walt took me in his arms . . . I was so engulfed by the idea of the picture it made that I thought I would cry. But then I remembered my luggage. . . . (OP 31-32)

This trait belongs to all Gallant characters. Form reflects content here: the episodic, cinematic texture of Gallant's stories, where one vignette blends into another, emphasizes the human tendency to envision oneself in rather trite, romantically conventional pictures. Gallant is ironic about more than vanity here; she implies a whole society's failure of imagination, and the adoption of a pathetically limited selection of stereotypical roles or scripts from which humans can choose.

Like Carol, Cissy, too, notes that something from her picture is missing:

I kept feeling that our real married life hadn't started, that there was nothing to say and wouldn't be for years. . . . It seemed to me it had been that way all my life, and that being married hadn't settled anything at all. (OP 37)

Again we note in Gallant the searching protagonist, in limbo or transition. In "Autumn Day," Cissy's problems are compounded further by setting--the limbo of an occupied city reluctant to accept the consequences of war in terms of individual lifestyles. Cissy's landlord, Herr Enrich, comments:

[H]e had taken in boarders before the war, but quite a different type--artists and opera singers, people who had come for the Salzburg Festival. "Now," he said politely, "one cannot choose." I wondered if that was meant for us. (OP 34)

Admitting outright that she is a child, Cissy accepts without question a list of orders from her husband--"Don't talk war. Avoid people on farm. Meet Army wives. Go for walks" (OP 34). She is even less intellectually equipped than Carol to understand a kind of experience outside her expectations. Another boarder demonstrates: Mr. de Kende once owned four factories, but is lately reduced to selling dental supplies from his car. "What do you think of that for Yalta justice?" Mr. de Kende challenges Cissy (OP 35). Cissy's response, though perhaps appropriate in terms of emotion, clearly demonstrates her naiveté about the

implications of the European war: "I didn't understand. All I could think of was my brother-in-law was a dentist, and how he'd taken me into his home when my mother died, and how kind he'd been, and I had to try to keep from crying in front of them all" (OP 35).

The cultural collision in this story may seem to glance off the protagonist simply because she lacks the intellectual capacity to register the blow. Cissy talks to no one except Mrs. de Kende, who frightens her in a way she does not understand, and Laura, the cynical, semi-alcoholic, sexually-betrayed wife of Walt's best friend. Both women provide a negative picture of "real marriage" to Cissy, who, remembering her revulsion at her sister's room, decides marriage means dirty bras on chairs.

Suddenly one of the former boarders, an American concert singer, returns to the farmhouse, and Cissy overhears the woman's beautiful singing voice. Miss West (the name not insignificant) has a voice "deep and sure [that] filled the sky" (OP 40). Cissy asks the farmer to translate the German lyrics of the song she has overheard called Herbsttag, or Autumn Day, and she feels for the first time since arriving in Austria that it "had something to do with me. It was autumn here, and Walt and I hadn't a house either" (OP 40).

Cissy tries to meet the reclusive Miss West by leaving her childish notes that, ironically, show her own identity crisis: "with sincere best wishes, Cecilia Rowe, Mrs. Walter T. Rowe" (OP

47). Cissy senses that Miss West can be a real friend--outside of marriage--and the reader senses her to be an agent of potential integration between America and post-War Europe, one that can make Cissy feel on firm ground (OP 49). In short, Cissy feels Miss West to be an authority who can validate her as an individual--not someone's child-bride, baby sister, or boarder. Cissy's hopes, of course, are thwarted. Invited to lunch by Miss West, she is handed the invitation only after the singer has left. Again she is forced back on her own resources.

Walt tries to comfort her, but he is as incapable of understanding her experience as she is of understanding the de Kendes'. As Cissy leans against him, weeping, he asks: "Was she going to give you lessons, or something?" (OP 52). Thus Cissy realizes she will "have to manage without help, without a friend more important than Walt. I wondered if all of this--my crying, Walt being bewildered--was married life, not just the preliminary" (OP 52).

There is limited character development in "Autumn Day" and Gallant traces it for us.

Your girlhood doesn't vanish overnight. I know, now, what a lot of wavering goes on, how you step forward and back again. . . . I do know that some change began then, at that moment, and I felt an almost unbearable nostalgia for the figure I was leaving behind, the shell of the girl who had got down from the train in

September, the pretty girl with all the blue plaid luggage. (OP, 52-53)

The protagonist here accepts disillusionment--more readily than Carol in "The Other Paris"--and matures. But the development is not comprehensive, and neither morally nor intellectually significant.

First, even in documenting for us her loss of girlhood, the narrator depends upon the image of the young girl--she cannot focus on any permanent change in her behavior or her attitude. There is simply too much happening for her to see her pretty pictures any more. Nor does she welcome this change--in fact, she admits an unbearable nostalgia.

Second, we know that Cissy is still incapable of accepting the "real life" of post-War Austria. At the end of the story, Mrs. de Kende accuses her of spreading the confidence that her husband is a Jew.

I felt guilty about her, in a vague way, as if I had let her down; as if I were really the one who had told about her husband. But that was just a momentary feeling. Mrs. de Kende was old and crazy, not a young girl like me. I began to dress to go out. (OP 52)

Of course Cissy is not responsible, but she does not think to examine where her sense of guilt stems from, and instead

summarily dismisses it as a momentary feeling, dismissing too Mrs. de Kende as old and crazy rather than an instance of very real persecution. Miss West is gone, and so is any hope of integration between the two kinds of experience in conflict.

Third, this character, like Carol, wants safety. Earlier in the story Mrs. de Kende compares her to "the smallest bird in Europe" who flies through to Austria en route to the South for winter. Herr Enrich finds one bird frozen to death, its eyes glazed, and throws it in the oven to destroy it. A macabre image for the witnesses of suffering in post-War Germany, the bird also stands for the danger of childish (small) characters who are ill-equipped to deal with a reality that at times involves ugliness, chaos and pain. The last lines of the story echo ironically--each declaration undermining the assurance of the narrator's protestation.

"We'll be all right," I echoed to Walt . . . "I'll be all right; we'll be all right."

But we're not safe yet, I thought, looking at my husband--this stranger, mute, helpless, fumbling, enclosed. Oh, we're not safe. Not by a long shot. But we'll be all right. Take my word for it. We'll be all right." (OP 53)

"All right" can mean a variety of things, and though we know the narrator survives, there is no evidence that she grows. We hear Cissy retelling the story years later that Walt forgets he ever

wrote a list of orders for his wife. Obviously, their marriage is still intact, but it is a deadening collaboration, safe only from vitality and change, deconstruction, "real" experience.

The motif of a search for love and "real" life is played out in a more complicated variation in Gallant's short novel "Its Image on the Mirror" (1964). In this story, the complicating factor is the first-person narrator, Jean Price, who is subject to identity-confusion. In "Its Image on the Mirror," Jean's identity-confusion specifies the origins of the internal barriers that plague Gallant's characters. Jean identifies most strongly with her mother:

As I grow older I see that our gestures are alike. . . .
I glance sharply behind me and I know I am reproducing my mother's quick turn of head. Our voices are alike. . . . I am pleased to be like her. There is no one I admire more. (MHB 65)

Jean's admiration, however, is matched by her resentment. She is obsessed with her younger sister, Isobel, who has left the family and owns, Jean believes, a capacity for life that Jean does not.

It seemed to me I had waited years for life to begin and that the false start of after-war was all there had been to wait for. The shape of life was pressed on stones in the form of ferns and snails, immutable. Yesterday, today, tomorrow: stones had picked up the pattern and

there was nothing I could change. Isobel had broken a stone. (MHB 63)

In short, Jean has fossilized the traits and tendencies of her family. She is a replica of her Anglo-Scot mother, in whom survives "the dark bloom of the Old Country--the mistrust of pity, the contempt for weakness, the fear of the open heart" (MHB 89). Gallant points out that the family tries to reproduce itself in its children, and that the survival of the family structure involves resisting change and diversity, and enshrining the ways of the past, even when they become obsolete.

In 1955, Jean helps her mother pack up the home in Allenton, Quebec that her parents have lived in for forty-two years. The Duncans, "Eastern-Canadian, Protestant, Anglo-Scot" (MHB 88), are leaving their town to the "new tide," the French, and their home to Catholic priests: "That's what Allenton has become" (MHB 66). Jean's description of the Allenton house emphasizes the barrenness of family life:

To be truthful, from home to institution wasn't an abrupt change. Even before the house was sold . . . it began to die. . . . Ghosts moved in the deserted rooms. . . . We never saw the ghosts, but we knew they were there. We were unable to account for them: no one had lived here but our family and none of us had died in Allenton. (MHB 59)

All of them have died, spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, we infer. Furthermore, the parents' lifelessness is reflected in two of their three children. Jean's mother is inanimate; she has shed tears only twice: once when Frank, Jean's younger brother, "said something dreadful about sex" (MHB 68); once when Isobel was dying. "She wept as I imagine a doll could--with a still face . . ." (MHB 68). (Note here that although Isobel has not died, the narrator's words do not correct the misperception: when we thought Isobel was dying. Her words do not allow for life prevailing.) Jean, too, has ominous symptoms: "I warmed my hands at [Isobel's] life" (MHB 92).

Jean's father is a more destructive force, and even his violence is seen as passionless, numbing. He is given to beating Frank--frequently--for transgressions such as reading The Yellow Fairy Book, which he throws into the lake. "[T]hose beatings, so alarming in retrospect, never disturbed our family life. Like The Yellow Fairy Book they sank below the surface" (MHB 82). And, like Jean, Frank incorporates his father's values:

Far from resenting the past, and our father's heavy hand, he seemed to be grateful. I often heard him boast about his upbringing . . . broken promises, the supperless nights, the frequent beatings, with self-satisfaction, as if they had made him the excellent person he was. . . . (MHB 82)

The image of The Yellow Fairy Book--a work of imagination sinking out of sight--throws light on the deadening presumptions that have created the Allenton ghosts: the Duncan mind is rigid, monotonous, resistant to new ideas, and in post-War Quebec, clearly obsolete.

Our father believed that Scottish blood was the best in the country, responsible for our national character traits of prudence, level-headedness, and self-denial. If anyone doubted it . . . [one] had only to look at the rest of Canada: the French-Canadians (political corruption, pusillanimity, hysteria); the Italians (hair oil [bootlegged] . . .); Russians and Ukrainians (regicide, Communism, pyromania, the distressing cult of nakedness on the West Coast); Jews (get in everywhere, the women don't wear corsets); Swedes, Finns (awful people for a bottle, never save a cent); Poles, hunkies, the whole Danubian fringe (they start all the wars). The Irish were Catholics, and the Germans had been beyond the pale since 1914. (MHB 138)

Both Jean and Frank are continuing agents of their father's prejudice: Jean maintains her children "have been taught One World (although not too much)" (MHB 93). Frank, less subtle than Jean, finds it "difficult to find fault with the integrity of a Scot" (MHB 138).

Like our father, Frank respected people who had made money, providing they were not Italian, Irish, Ukrainian and so forth, in which case the rise in wealth was put down to political chicanery and the complete absence of any sort of moral sense. (MHB 138-139)

Jean's alliance to her mother becomes stronger through her courtship with and marriage to Tom. Tom, a rejected beau of Isobel's, turns his attention to Jean, and with Mrs. Duncan's manoeuvring, Jean holds his attention. Shortly after they begin dating, Jean and Tom have their "first shared experience"--a car accident (MHB 105).

I was closer to him than I had ever been to my father or brother, and I was not afraid of him. I was never afraid of Tom. We swam in the lake and made love on the dock. I knew what I was doing, I was not afraid of him, or of the shock part of the accident. I knew he would marry me. I decided to love him with a determination I had never shown about anything else. He asked me to marry him after we were dressed; not as an afterthought, but perhaps part of the accident, too. (MHB 105)

Again Gallant's protagonist is determined to love. The moving force behind her marriage is a near-fatal accident, and the proposal proceeds from the numbness of shock. Fortunately, Tom is at once a choice endorsed by authority, Mrs. Duncan, and yet another vicarious connection between Jean and Isobel. But

the connection does not satisfy Jean's hunger for Isobel's life, and ironically, even Jean perceives that the "safe" choice is not entirely safe. Of her marriage, Jean senses "the wrong question might still pull down the house. You can never be certain of that house" (MHB 104).

Nonetheless, Jean settles for this house, in which Tom never speaks of love, and betrays her own sense of emptiness by demonstrating that even in 1955, a decade after marriage, she is still obsessed with her sister's life. Frank has been killed during the war. Isobel has been in Caracas for six years, having eloped with Alfredo, an Italian doctor, shortly after her unexpected recuperation from a near-fatal disease leaves her family "looking like fools" (MHB 62).

In Montreal while her husband attends a conference, Isobel proposes a Labor Day reunion at the family cottage. Events of the weekend polarize the two sisters. Jean, "intensely conscious of her appearance," moves toward her younger sister (MHB 76):

[T]he signs of aging that had begun so young with me stopped when Isobel married. . . . [I]f there was an aura around me it was of Yardley talcum powder. . . . I was part of my mother and father, and my children were part of me. I had succeeded in that, and Isa had failed. (MHB 76-77)

Isobel is "straggly and unkempt--the aging bohemian" (MHB 75). Jean reports she seems "washed-out, rather than fair, and gaunt instead of slim" (MHB 75). However, Gallant has shown Jean to be a poor judge of what is truly vital, while Isobel is clearly a dynamic, if disorderly, force. Indeed, Isobel's aging is in itself evidence that she has really lived. Jean, smug about the uniformity that she confuses with family unity, suggests that Isobel is wretched, but the reader perceives otherwise:

I heard Alfredo say "Why didn't you warn me about the food?" I heard Isobel's laughter, but not her reply. She saw me. The laughter stopped, her eyes darkened, and then I remembered how she had looked when she was dying. She summed me up. Her total tallied with mine, but failed to daunt her. My pride in my children was suddenly nothing. I was part of a wall of cordial family faces, and Isobel was not hurt by her failure, or impressed by my success, but thankful she had escaped. (MHB 77)

The weekend ends. Jean, disappointed that Isobel has said nothing to her, begins to sift through memories of her relationship with her sister, focusing on the wartime years when Tom, and Isobel's first husband, Davy, were overseas.

Isobel is the only character in the novella who manifests a potential for vitality. She escapes, for the most part, the imprint of her family; to a much lesser degree, Frank does too.

Gallant implies that their capacity for freedom stems from the time they spent, as children, away from their family. Both Frank and Isobel were "TB types" and sent to a relative in the Laurentians for occasional winters. The relative, "a woman my mother considered friendly but common" let the children "run wild" (MHB 123).

They had in common a memory of winter and sun; of choosing whatever they wanted to eat in the hotel dining room--I believed this shocked our mother more than anything else. They could speak French, of a sort, and had experienced a rhythm of life foreign to me. Only occasionally some word, or gesture, would bring them together within this memory, and they would glance at each other, in accord. My mother never encouraged this; but still the memory must have persisted for Isobel. . . . (MHB 123)

Both the common relative and Isobel can be categorized as the disorderly principle that defies or renounces family structure and convention, and proves to be a freeing influence. Jean is the repressed child, the exact mold of her parents; Isobel is the irrepressible child, spontaneous, rebellious, unpredictable. Like most other characters of her ilk in Gallant's oeuvre, Isobel is tainted--impure--according to the conventional morality. Like Felix in "The Other Paris," she exemplifies "authentic" experience. Like Felix, she is an ambiguous figure: not always sympathetic, hardly admirable--but in comparison to the other

characters, more genuine, more human, more appealing. The make-up of these characters reflects Gallant's presentation of reality--ambiguous, too--a realm of potential creation and destruction.

Like Felix, Isobel lives in relative squalor. Her job involves some degree of corruption--she works for a real estate opportunist, in her husband Davy's words, lending her charming face and pretty voice to the business of duping wartime refugees who will pay anything for a roof (MHB 120). In contrast, Jean, substituting for an engineer, colors sewers on railway maps purple and yellow; in the evenings, she wraps up mock wounded after mock air raids. Both of Jean's occupations are ironic--the irrelevance of the first aid committee is self-evident; her day-job involves a foray into what is hidden, mysterious, underground--but only to impose dual-color order over it.

Isobel's "corrupted innocence" (MHB 88), which enchants men, also attracts Jean, who realizes that Isobel is not living in the wartime world of "emptiness, empty streets" (MHB 89) as Jean is. If Isobel is a crook, she is nonetheless dealing with the real human consequences of the war--and Isobel is able to integrate the cultural conflicts that the reader perceives between Jean's values and wartime Montreal. Isobel, it seems, has escaped her parents' prejudices.

She knew Greeks, Italians, refugees, Jews; people . . . who could not pronounce "th" and never would. She knew

French-Canadians--not foreign, but young, sullen, and blasphemous; my generation, but a class unknown to me.

(MHB 94)

Isobel is the character, then, capable of the kind of experience that has eluded Jean--and only through Isobel does Jean believe she can have "real" experience. "In those days, I had one pursuit, and that was my sister's life" (MHB 91). Isobel stands not only for the exotic life Jean's conventions isolate her from, not only as mediator to an alien Quebec, but as romantic heroine:

[I had] scarcely ever finished reading a fairy-tale in my life. A prince of a country: what country? Which castle? I never understood. . . . It was Isobel I imagined as the eternal heroine--never myself. I substituted her feelings for my own, and her face for any face described. . . . She was the Little Mermaid, she was Heidi; later she was Gatsby's Daisy. She was Anna Karenina with the velvet dress and the little crown of pansies on her head. (MHB 84-85)

We infer here that Jean does confuse real experience with fantasy, a made-up fiction. Turning her sister into a symbol with whom she can identify allows Jean a connection with a vital force--a peripheral connection, vicarious vitality, but vitality, albeit tenuous. At the same time, her parasitic alliance with Isobel stops her from discovering herself, and Jean expresses

this ambivalence: "I knew that Isobel's death would end the problem of my sister forever, and that if she died, I had every reason to live" (MHB 62). Instead, when Isobel effectively "dies" by eloping with Alfredo, Jean states "I felt as though my own life drained away with her" (MHB 64).

Paralyzed by her ambivalence, living by turns through alliance with mother and sister (and rejected by the latter for this very reason), Jean generally displays her parents' identities. Eavesdropping on a conversation between her teenaged brother and sister, Jean overhears Isobel has had a lover.

"Don't get yourself caught," said Frank. "Don't tell Jean."

"Don't tell Jean": that was unkind of them, but no matter. "Are you going to marry him?" should surely have been "Do you think he'll want to marry you now?" Isobel ought to be beaten. If she were my sister I'd take a strap to her: I mean--correcting the thought--if I were her brother. (MHB 103)

Obviously both Frank and Isobel regard Jean as a judgmental parent, and Jean's confusion about her relationship to Isobel is significant. Her response reflects typical Duncan values, patriarchal rules and her father's violence.

Jean's sense of emptiness pushes her toward Isobel's life, in spite of her moralistic stand. When Jean discovers her sister is

having an illicit love affair while their husbands are overseas, her reaction betrays a hunger that overrules her values. She follows Isobel and her married lover, Alec, down the street:

They emerged out of the dark and took form as a couple. . . . They leaned inward as they walked, as if both had received an injury and were helping each other stand up. Isobel's face was a flower. Everything wary and closed, removed and mistrustful had disappeared. . . . I imagined they told each other that they were special, like no lovers who had ever existed. Whenever I tried to imagine the conversation of lovers it was like that. I was twenty-seven and married but fanciful as a little girl. I had an idea about love, and I thought my sister knew the truth. Until the time of my own marriage I had sworn I would settle for nothing less than a certain kind of love. However, I had become convinced, after listening to my mother and to others as well, that a union of that sort was too fantastic to exist; nor was it desirable. (MHB 98)

Like Carol, like Cissy, Jean has chosen safety over passion, but childish fancies drive her to search for an experience "more real" than her own--thus dooming her to be the spectator, instead of the actor: "They were the lighted window; I was the watcher on the street" (MHB 99). More perceptive and articulate than Carol in "The Other Paris," Jean realizes the cause of her anguish:

All at once I felt as if the absence of love in my life, my solitude, my chastity, were visible and ugly as a disease. I felt dreary and defiled before these sinners. They were right and I was wrong. . . . I thought that my sister ought to have helped me, but even now I don't see what she could have done. (MHB 100)

Isobel's affair with Alec, coincidental with the death of Frank, brings Jean and Isobel within reach of one another. The girls return to Allenton at the news of Frank's death overseas. Jean takes Frank's room, and Isobel, without her brother as confidante, resorts to confiding in Jean: pregnant with Alec's child, she has decided on abortion. Although she needs no help with details, she will need "somebody's whole attention" after the procedure (MHB 152). Finally Isobel seems ready to accept what Jean has long offered--care, mothering, love. And Jean will be able to touch Isobel's life, to be seen as more than "flat-minded," "a pattern of life discarded" (MHB 91). Jean dreams that in this moment the sisters will finally acknowledge their intimacy and express their love:

From that moment I stopped being the stranger on the dark street and I moved into the bright rooms of my sister's life. The doors were opened to me; everything had been leading to my entrance, my participation. . . . If Isobel needed me, then I had overcome the common inheritance, the family walls. (MHB 149)

But the family inheritance implies a past not so easily undone:

Leave us there . . . with our childhoods between us going on to the horizon without a break. It was so plain and simple; and I thought that unless we could meet across that landscape we might as well die. . . . I moved forward, kneeling, in the most clumsy movement possible. It was dragging oneself through water against the swiftest current, in the fastest river in the world; I . . . took her thin relaxed hand in mine. We met in a corner of the landscape and she glanced at me, then slid her hand out of mine and said, "Oh, don't." (MHB 153)

Isobel's refusal wakes Jean: "[I] had attempted something beyond our capacities" (MHB 153). Two separate landscapes cannot suddenly merge, and Jean cannot enclose her sister's life within her own any more successfully than Carol could make post-War Paris blend into middle-class America.

Jean does realize this--even as she assures Isobel, "You don't need any addresses except mine," she reports that Isobel's expression is that of a refugee using faulty English: "someone who has lost his language wears that look, that despair" (MHB 152). The moment of intimacy lost, Jean turns the exchange--in keeping with family and cultural tradition--into a transaction.

She wanted my attention, and would pay for it. She would tell me about Davy and Alec and life and love.

She would tell me everything I wanted to know. She would never shut the door again and leave me on the street. (MHB 153)

And Isobel complies. Ironically, in telling her sister about Alec, life and love, Isobel explains why Jean is unable to overcome the walls. "'It [this secret] was the only kind of love,' Isobel said calmly. Alec had told her so. . . . You need to have someone between you and the others, blotting out the light" (MHB 151). What Isobel blots out, of course, are her families' rigid values. Shady secrets constitute freedom; the light the Duncans shed is blinding, deadening.

Jean suddenly recalls the headlights before the car crash and tastes the inevitability of dying. The sisters are at cross purposes here. Jean is trying to overcome the family walls she has internalized in order to live through Isobel; Isobel is building up walls between herself and her family (who threaten life and threaten openness) through her lover. Ironically, too, Isobel's statement reveals that her passion for Alec involves childish dependence--the cost, perhaps, of resisting the deadening influence of all her "parents."

Having tasted death, and realizing that she has been shut out of Isa's life, Jean wakes from her dreams. Both the narrator's words and the epigraph that begins the novel indicate the meaning of the dreams:

[It might] never end: the night, the winter, the war. . . . We woke from dreams of love remembered, a house recovered and lost, a climate imagined, a journey never made; we woke dreaming our mothers had died in childbirth and heard ourselves saying, "Then there is no one left but me!" . . . I knew, that night, we . . . would remain. . . . We would survive, and waking--because there was no help for it--forget our dreams and return to life. (MHB 154-155)

"Return to life" is a spiritual death for Jean: she gives up any hope of being a person apart from her mother or sister. In this sense, the dream of being motherless, which we normally would interpret as a dream about lovelessness, may well be a subconscious wish of Jean's: if her mother had died in childbirth, there would be no Isobel, and Jean the only "real" person left. But Jean has woken from her dreams, and is left trying to find herself in a mirror--her sister. The epigraph of the novella, from William Butler Yeats' "The Shadowy Waters," foreshadows the outcome:

What is love itself,
Even tho' it be the lightest of light love,
But dreams that hurry from beyond the world. . . .
Fellow-wanderer,
Could we but mix ourselves into a dream
Not in its image on the mirror. (as quoted; MHB 55)

Jean, longing for love, for passion, mistakes her sister--a mirror-image--as the dream that can free her from the deadening reality of her parents' middle-class values and provide her with the capacity for vitality, for natural spontaneous intercourse with life, not dependent on accidents, temporarily-numbed value systems, or Anglo-Scot determination. Unlike Cissy and Carol, Jean is not even the heroine of her own visions: Isobel is. Jean is only "the watcher," and thus incapable of any real integration or involvement in the landscape of dreams.

In "The Cost of Living" (March 1962), a short story once again set in Paris, the situation of one sister envying another's capacity for love is repeated. However, neither sister in this story constitutes a dynamic force: "The Prussian ancestry on our mother's side had given us something bleached and cold" (MHB 159). Puss, the younger sister, runs away from home at twenty-seven--too late, it seems, to have avoided the deadening influence of her austere Australian parents. A music mistress, Puss gains no vitality from her work: "to teach solfège to stiff-fingered children" was not her dream (MHB 158). Further, she avoids any involvement in others' lives: "Friendship in bohemia meant money borrowed, recriminations, complaints, tears, theft and deceit" (MHB 164).

The money borrowed in "The Cost of Living" shows us that Gallant's characters are more comfortable making financial transactions with others. Thus they authenticate their own perception of experience, rather than engage in experience as

free agents for themselves. Like Jean, the two main characters here attempt to make a deal to experience real life; they literally try to buy love and vitality.

From Australia (down under), Puss resents that her sister, Louise, has been left more money than she by their parents: Louise "earned" it, caring for them until their deaths.

" I inherited . . . fifteen shillings a month. They might have made it a pound. It was only fair; she had stayed home and carried trays and fetched the afternoon papers--just as she was doing now--while I had run away. Nevertheless, although she was rich and I was poor, she treated me as an equal. I mean by that that she never bought me a cheese sandwich. . . . (MHB 171)

Puss believes money is love, vitality: "Money, money . . . it does bring happiness" (MHB 177). Louise, pale and duty-worn despite her inheritance, proves Puss wrong. Her management of money signifies her emotional repression, the real family inheritance:

In all financial matters, Louise was bound to the rows of numbers in her account books. . . . The columns were headed "Paid" and "Received," in the old-fashioned way, but at the top of each page our father, and then Louise, crossed out the printed words and wrote "Necessary" and "Unnecessary." When Louise was obliged to buy a

Christmas or birthday present for anyone, she marked the amount she had spent under "Unnecessary." (MHB 168)

The sisters are contrasted by Sylvie, an amoral young Parisian who has no money, but is endowed with vitality and spontaneity:

"Well, I do need money," said the girl, rather cheerfully. . . . "Oh, imagine being on top of the world on top of a pile of money!" This was not said plaintively but with an intense vitality that was like a third presence on the stairs. (MHB 169)

Her request shocks Louise in much the same way as an invitation to an orgy would (MHB 169). At the same time, Louise recognizes that Sylvie is a dynamic force--she is unconventional, disorderly, and emphasizes by contrast the "bleached" pallor of Puss and Louise: her "shining" eyes are a "true black," and the "firm tread of her feet specified a quality of strength that had nothing in common with the forced liveliness of Parisian girls . . ." (MHB 162). Appropriately, Louise confirms Sylvie's nature in financial terms: "she [Sylvie] seems terribly emotional and generous. I don't know why, but she gives you the feeling of generosity. I'm sure she does herself a lot of harm" (MHB 175).

Louise is fascinated by the dynamic Sylvie, and pursues her friendship, lending her the money she needs in return for Sylvie's closeness. Louise even offers to take Sylvie home with

her to Australia; Sylvie refuses. Soon after, on a shopping trip ostensibly aimed to help Puss recover from the flu, Louise brings an expensive necklace--for Sylvie. This is the first of a series of gifts to Sylvie that, Puss reports resentfully, Louise notes under "Necessary" (MHB 179). In her records, the prices of these gifts are deflated; the price of other items, such as "Aspirin for Puss," multiplied times four to mask this "cost of living." For this is the cost of living: the intimacy between the duty-worn Louise and dynamic Sylvie, based on Louise's gifts, is as close to vitality and passion as Louise will come.

The intimacy, we know, is doomed; passion does not translate easily into neatly arranged columns, and, in any case, Louise defrauds herself by manipulating the figures that reflect the true cost of living. As in "Its Image on the Mirror," the protagonist's experience is vicarious on more than one level. Louise has had a brief sexual liaison with Patrick, another boarder, who really loves, and has been intimate with, Sylvie. Both Puss and Louise are infatuated by Patrick, and when he moves from the building, both feel betrayed. Louise confides her "true love" to Sylvie; Puss suppresses her feelings and even her dreams.

Eventually, Louise and Sylvie come into conflict. Louise tries to reform her; she urges Sylvie to find a position that is more secure--to live with relatives, to find work: "look at Puss" (MHB 186); Sylvie resists. Patrick sends a letter to Sylvie, which Puss steals: it begins "Mon amour" (MHB 190). Seeing the

letter on Puss's desk, Sylvie sums up the deal that the women have forged: "Everything is so easy for people like Louise and you. You go on the assumption that no one will ever hurt you, and so nobody ever dares. Nobody dares because you don't expect it. It isn't fair" (MHB 191). Sylvie vanishes that night, having made it clear that the transaction is complete. Louise, insulated from reality, from passion and pain, because she has the currency to spend on security--keeping at a safe distance--returns home. Gallant suggests that the middle-class sisters end up embezzling authentic emotions from Sylvie, who, of a different class (MHB 183), has never had a financial buffer between her needs and the world's price for satisfying them.

The system of metaphors in this story might suggest that the theme is as trite as "money can't buy you happiness." Indeed, when Sylvie suddenly returns to retrieve her items (ironically having joined a cult that eschews materialism), she states this idea plainly. Hearing out her anti-material philosophy, Puss responds, "In that case . . . you won't need the necklace" (MHB 193). Sylvie returns it (reluctantly), but she also exacts her price; her parting remark echoes in Puss's mind.

"I don't need it," said Sylvie, backing away. "I'd have been as well off without it. Everything I've done I've had to do. It never brought me *bonheur*."
If the necklace had done nothing for Sylvie, what would it do for me? I went on down the stairs with the necklace in my pocket, and I thought, selfish child.

After everything that was given her, she might have been more grateful. She might have bitten back the last word. (MHB 193)

Sylvie does point out for us the truth that Puss evades until the end of the story: that Puss, too, lived vicariously through Louise, as Louise through Sylvie. Puss mistakes the necklace for the money she believes does bring happiness (MHB 177) until Sylvie refutes this. So she is left alone, with a meagre stipend that will not buy her passion or love or vitality, even vicariously. In "The Cost of Living," Gallant suggests complex implications about different meanings for the value and the price of "family inheritance," the human tendency to try to balance experience in simple terms of cost and return, and, most interesting, how people use their relationships as a kind of currency to "own" experience they cannot or choose not to live through themselves. This relates to Gallant's distinction between accuracy and truth: in "The Cost of Living," Louise's account books stand as proof that the characters in these stories literally embezzle the truth.

Other stories fit into this category as well. In "My Heart is Broken" (August 1961), a naive, even obtuse, young woman is wistful about a rapist who has not liked her. The title character of "The Moabites" (November 1957) is a lonely and seemingly prudish woman who really lives in a memory-cum-fantasy world that involves an incestuous romance with her father.

The point of view Gallant chooses in these stories, and the relative naiveté of the central characters, mark these works as the simplest presentation of a pattern upon which Gallant elaborates in her later stories. The pattern documented here can be traced in all Gallant's fiction. In her novels and the stories classified in Chapters III and IV, her focus shifts from a naïve individual to a central character who has already been disillusioned on her quest, and who is rich in contradictions, ambiguities, hypocrisies. At the same time, Gallant's emphasis shifts also to examine the dynamics of the relationships created by these characters, and how these relationships consolidate the hypocrisies and deceptions that prevent the characters from distinguishing truth from accuracy, and from engaging in real or productive conflict rather than futile and static confrontations.

CHAPTER III

COMPLICITY IN DECEIT: THE FAMILY STRUCTURE

Chapter II groups those stories of Gallant that focus on the individual's search for "real" life--usually identified by the protagonist as love or passion. Gallant's preoccupation in these stories is primarily with the ways an individual thwarts her own search. Gallant further explores why, even if successful momentarily, the individual ultimately rejects 'real' experience--why it becomes a "route struck off the map" ("Its Image on the Mirror," MHB 91).

Chapter III examines the fictional works of Gallant in which she expands her focus to include relationships in which individual hypocrisies become an established pattern, consolidated by other individuals. This broader focus is in part signalled by a shift from the first person or limited omniscient point of view to the omniscient perspective. More important distinctions involve the characteristics and circumstances of the protagonists of these stories.

In the fiction of the first category, the protagonists are generally young, naive, ignorant of "real" experiences such as economic hardship, racial persecution, or "illicit" sexual involvement. They are explicit about and active in their search for an ideal "reality"--even though the ideal may be a concoction

of their own mind or an uncritical mirror of society's values, even though they may choose a vicarious route to achieve it. The characters who figure in the stories of this second grouping are without exception more worldly than those of the first; they are not only disillusioned by real life but feel betrayed--betrayed by the discovery that the order whose existence they took for granted does not exist. These characters see themselves as victims of real life, and are understandably more suspicious, even paranoid, about the meaning of real experience than those characters, like Carol, who have not yet allowed themselves to engage in it.

Shirley, the main character of the novel A Fairly Good Time (1970), after her young husband's death, recalls her mother's warning that one treeless, sunless day, real life would overtake her. "All right, real life has begun," Shirley thinks. "What's your next prophecy?" (FGT 241). She had, as a child, inferred from her mother that real life was "the gray noon with no limits. . . . It was the middle-aged world without feeling, where no one was loved" (FGT 234). Disillusioned, betrayed, victimized, these characters have nonetheless survived. This is, perhaps, what they perceive as the greatest shock and the worst betrayal: they are survivors, abandoned by or exiled from the context in which they chose to see themselves. Most commonly in these stories, this context consists of a family life. Once that framework is destroyed, they are conscious of the pointlessness of fashioning an ideal image in the face of an indifferent reality. Eventually these characters withdraw from any active

search for "what they want out of life"--to borrow Louise's words (MHB 169)--and become passive. All these protagonists declare they are waiting--waiting for random events and encounters to restore to them a definite role, of which real life has deprived them.

Typically these characters' voices are indifferent, if not cynical. If they talk about seeking passion or truth, they are generally looking backwards, wondering where the search went wrong. Love and romance do not exist as real or lasting forces in their lives, and the characters in general voice a fear of passion. If, rarely, a character does voice a desire for passion, it is expressed in passive terms. "[Shirley] wanted life to be passionate in itself and could only imagine this in terms of being loved" (FGT 98-99). Their expectations do not transcend the status quo, and their wishes are more often wistful than hopeful. Involuntarily set free from well-defined contexts with predictable outcomes, these characters withdraw into a limbo where they drift from one encounter to another, waiting for useful instructions from such unlikely authorities as skywriters (Green Water, Green Sky, 1959, 122).

Having withdrawn from active engagement with reality, these characters, like those studied in Chapter II, feature no character development and remain childish. Cut off from their past, directionless, they wander into roles for simple want of structure; sometimes, it seems, their need for a part to play is no more than a childish need to create an image for an illusory

audience. Dependent on chance to supply them a role, they are further dependent on the cues of others to determine this role. They are not creators, but spectators, waiting to become players in a script already written. Thus Shirley, the main character of A Fairly Good Time, complains:

[S]he had been invited to act in a play without having been told the name of it. No one had ever mentioned who the author was or if the action was supposed to be sad or hilarious. She came on stage wondering whether the plot was gently falling apart or rushing onward toward a solution. Cues went unheeded and unrecognized, and she annoyed the other players by bringing in lines from any other piece she happened to recall. (FGT 179-180)

The roles these debilitated characters assume are unsuitable, inherently ironic, and are the source of much of the humor in Gallant's work. The relationships they form with others are based on mutual fear, disappointment, guilt, or indifference. The individuals cooperate in these relationships, by piecing together remnants of illusions that each holds about herself or the world. The players' goal then becomes to protect this fabrication and to avoid any real conflict that might threaten to change their illusions, or thrust either individual into the upheaval of real life again. The characters do occasionally sense their hypocrisies, but again their insights are fleeting--missed epiphanies--and the pattern of complicity between the players to rationalize their deadening compromises

proves that these symbiotic pacts are much more effective barriers to reality than the individual mind by itself.

All the characters--principals and intermediaries--cooperate in avoiding upheaval in favor of predictable confrontations, static tensions. The conflicts between the players are generally trivial, and never seriously threaten the stable framework of the relationship. The relationship is a simple institution--it is its own small world with its own codes, its own rules, a place where characters' actions are seemingly impervious to events of the world outside:

Like many people no longer in love, [the Knights] cemented their relationship with opinions, pet prejudices, secret meanings, a private vocabulary that enabled them to exchange amused glances over a dinner table and made them feel a shade superior to the world outside the house. ("Bernadette," MHB 16)

If the relationship allows the players to feel superior, Gallant's dissection of the individual roles nonetheless suggests that complicity does not mean equality. All the relationships Gallant presents divide at the simplest level into those characters who are oppressors and those who are their victims. Still, she never oversimplifies the role structures. Gallant's oppressors are hopelessly enervated, impotent; her victims willing and long-suffering; the intermediary characters at times catalysts to discord, at times "lightning rods." Furthermore the

roles fluctuate: oppressor momentarily becomes victim and vice versa. Or the roles are proven to be ironic: who is really oppressor, who victim? These fluctuations too are static, rarely extreme enough to shake the equilibrium of the relationship.

Gallant's characters here, more dramatically than in earlier stories, show a failure of imagination--implying that, as Ronald Hatch states, freedom from predetermined roles is too much for human beings to bear in the modern world (98). The picture darkens further in that intermediary characters do not offer a dynamic alternative or point toward freedom--or even simple unpredictability--as do figures like Sylvie or Isobel. While these latter characters are touched by Gallant's irony, they are not satiric targets as are their counterparts in stories of this second category: Bernadette (in the story of the same title), illiterate and pregnant with a stranger's child she is sure will die in infancy, is a delightfully ironic agent of insight and bearer of "vital" forces for her pretentious employers.

The personal relationships dissected in these stories are presented within the larger context of hierarchical institutions that are built within specific social and political conditions. Though Gallant's focus here, to use her own words, still is the human rather than the social collapse (GWGS 139), these features of her settings figure more significantly in the fabric of the stories of this category than in the stories of the grouping discussed earlier.

Gallant's vehicle is fiction, but she proves to be no less astute a social commentator than those sociologists who explore the rootlessness of "mass man." Gallant's stories confirm the observations of Wilhelm Reich, Hannah Arendt, and Jacques Ellul, that modern man, influenced by the levelling processes of science, technology, urbanization, modern communication and political ideology, sees himself as a performer of a function, a cog in a process over which he can exercise no control. Ironically, Gallant suggests, it seems humans would rather play out their lives within an illusory structure than risk acting freely in an unpredictable reality. Almost without exception, they favor image over deed, structure over content. Ronald Hatch suggests that Gallant documents the nightmare of history spawned by liberal ideology (93). In other words, Gallant's stories indicate the consequences to individual lives when the mass illusion of a fair, ordered world is shattered by experience. These consequences include the deliberate disengagement or distortion of perceptive powers, rendering individuals susceptible, in relationships, to being "washed together by a tide of mutual mindlessness" (GWGS 105).

A few of the stories included in this second grouping retain primary characteristics of the first: "Potter," "In The Tunnel," and A Fairly Good Time maintain a single point of view throughout. They are discussed in this chapter because relationships receive equivalent emphasis in these stories, and the protagonists are entirely consistent with the profile outlined above.

Gallant's first novel, Green Water, Green Sky, consists of four short stories that explore the complicated interactions of the same family of characters, seen at four different periods in their lives. The short stories are not presented in chronological order, but, typical of Gallant, shift between present and past. This device parallels the shifting roles the characters assume with one another.

Bonnie is a charming but childish middle-aged woman who, "after years of struggling to remain adult in a grown-up world . . . had found it unrewarding" (GWGS 22). Bonnie's husband has divorced her--and in effect their daughter, Flor--after Bonnie is caught having an affair with her doctor. Flor's father promptly remarries; Bonnie, caught by the edicts of the Catholic church to which she converted for her husband, "doesn't believe" in her divorce. Doomed to the limbo of being at once wife and ex-wife, unable to remarry even to pretend she can create a stable environment for Flor, Bonnie drags her teenaged daughter around Europe as though on perpetual holiday, when actually she has been set adrift. A victim of her own weaknesses and submission to ludicrous authorities, Bonnie predictably proves an incompetent authority for her own daughter. Flor and Bonnie's relationship is the central focus of the novel: it is as complex as it is neurotic.

The two, both desperate children, are thrown together by their mutual need. Though Flor recognizes and resents her mother's incompetence, she needs Bonnie in order to survive; on

the other hand, though Bonnie resents her daughter's youth and beauty, Flor provides her with at least one clear role to play: self-sacrificing mother. Their relationship exemplifies the contradictory fluctuation of roles that occurs when a relationship is based on complicity to reconstruct the truth. Bonnie has been cut off from her comfortable past by guilt; Flor, an innocent victim, must also renounce that past or face her father's betrayal of her. The two, united in recreating the past, still are not able to evade it entirely. Years later, Bonnie, worried about her married daughter's imminent emotional breakdown, attempts to help:

"You know, I used to know a doctor . . ." (sic).

"I know," said Flor, loathing awakened.

But Bonnie hadn't meant that old disastrous love affair. . . .

"You see," said Flor. "I'm perfectly all right and I don't need a priest. Mama. Listen. I'm all right. I'm slightly anemic. It makes me pale. Don't you remember, I was always a bit anemic?"

Flor had said what Bonnie wanted said.

"Oh, I know," said Flor's mother eagerly. "I remember! . . . You were anemic. Of course, I remember now." (GWGS 59-60)

Flor, rejecting Bonnie's pose as authority, momentarily plays on her guilt about the true past, but immediately reverts to calling up a past they have created together in order to ensure

her mother's predictable reaction. By pretending that the role structure as they have always played it is intact, Flor avoids any confrontation that might threaten her plans to slip quietly away from reality and real conflict. Thus Bonnie and Flor are mutually manipulative, mutually protective, and conspirators in hypocrisy.

Bonnie's hypocrisies are further revealed in her relationship with Wishart, the point of view character for one of these related short stories. Another refugee from the past, Wishart has renounced his background of British poverty and commonness in favor of an imagined upper-class British "Squire," a phantom parent, too brutish to accept Wishart's artistic bent (GWGS 88-89). Aptly, Wishart teaches drama in an American boys' school and spends holidays like "a certain type of murderer . . . among middle-aged solitary women" (GWGS 90). Wishart is the symbolic male in the lives of these women--one who "would never cause 'trouble'" and in return expects the material means to play out the role of urbane companion (GWGS 91). When his friend hints her material means are dwindling, he soon tires of her pretensions to be a dedicated mother, a European sophisticate (unaware, she chooses a gay beach), and a piercing wit (her aggression toward Flor's fiancé, Bob Harris, is humorless).

Through Wishart's eyes we witness the beginning of the young couple's relationship. Most of Bob and Flor's courtship takes place on the beach. Significantly, Wishart reports that the two seem "washed together by a tide of mutual mindlessness and simple

desire" (GWGS 105). In fact, Flor appeals to Bob because she is the first woman who disappears into the outline of his ideal, the beseeching princess who wears "an air of patient supplication until a husband can be found" (GWGS 105). For her part, Flor is attracted to Bob because, unlike her, he has no past to evade or invent. The son of self-educated immigrant Jewish parents, Bob is a modern American--confident, egotistical, pragmatic; he feels at home in any situation.

Even when she is in love on the beach, Flor fears the sea, and feels she is on a narrowing shore ever encroached upon by water (GWGS 28). Bob's nickname is "Seal;" he feels at home even when he is not on solid ground, even without any sense of a continuity from the past that Flor, ironically, "had been taught to draw support from" (GWGS 111). Recognizing that Bob is sure of himself without a past, she sees in him a route to her survival in the present where she feels all structure giving way:

Lacking an emotional country, it might be possible to consider another person one's home. She pressed her face against his unmoving arm, accepting everything imperfect, as one accepts a faulty but beloved country, or the language in which one's thoughts are formed. It was the most dangerous of ideas, this "only you can save me," but her need to think it was so overwhelming that she wondered if this was what men, in the past, had been trying to say when they had talked about love. (GWGS 112)

The rescue is doomed, of course. Once Flor becomes aware that Bob is only a mirror reflecting her emptiness with none of her discomfort, she realizes marriage is not a safe port.

Bob and Flor's relationship is further complicated by Bonnie's interference. Even though Bob and Flor do love one another, in some ways Bob will always be the outsider: "He saw for the first time the two [women] were alike and perhaps inseparable; they had a private, casual way of speaking and laughed at the same things" (GWGS 109).

Bonnie and Bob's relations are ambiguous. Bonnie resents being dependent on a son-in-law she despises because he's a merchant and a Jew, whom she considers uncultured. However, when Flor's behavior becomes more and more eccentric, Bob and Bonnie become allies, "joined enemies" who insist Flor function in the real world (GWGS 69).

The interplay among the three is ultimately a mutually destructive force. As Flor retreats further and further from reality, Bob asks her if she is afraid of bombs; he does not understand her response.

"Remember once when we were out walking, remember under the bridge, the boy kicking the man? The man was lying down."

"What's the good of thinking about that?" he said.

"Somebody's kicking somebody else all the time. You

can't make yourself responsible for everything."

"Why didn't the man at least get up? His eyes were open."

He had been afraid she would say, "Why didn't we help him?" . . . He said something he hadn't thought of 'til now. It seemed irrefutable: "We don't know what the man had done to him first." Perhaps she accepted this; it caused a silence. (GWGS 66-67)

What really frightens Flor is that cruelties in relationships exist at all levels. Significantly, what seems to disturb Flor most is that one individual accepts the abuse of another even though the victim is aware of the cruelty as such: "His eyes were open." Bob and Flor touch one another briefly after this exchange, but their attempt to come together fails for several reasons. First, Bob does not recognize the sources of Flor's fears. Second, when he touches Flor, at the same time remembering the feel of her touch long ago on the beach, he is repulsed by the contrast. Finally, Bonnie enters uninvited, and the connection is irretrievably broken. Bob and Flor are relieved:

No present horror equaled the potential suffering of the past. Reliving the past, with full knowledge of what was to come, was a test too strong for their powers. It would have been too strong for anyone; they were not magical; they were only human beings. (GWGS 69)

Gratefully, Bob and Flor resume their new roles--tiresome wife and patient husband.

Two intermediary characters throw light on Gallant's view of how human relationships function. Doris, an American neighbor of the threesome who has been abandoned by her husband, needs the Harrises' friendship. The narrator confirms Flor's perspective of intimacy as oppressive, invasive: "[Doris] would want them all, and all their secrets. She would fill the idleness of her days with their affairs. She would disgorge secrets of her own, and the net would be woven and tight and over their heads" (GWGS .42). Doris, victimized by her husband, nonetheless plays oppressive parent to Flor, monitoring her behavior when Bob, away on business, and Bonnie, on vacation, leave Flor alone in Paris. However, she emerges in the novel as the only character who is capable of action. Eventually locked out by Flor, she leaves a letter:

"[I] understood when you locked me out that what is needed is not slow suffering or hanging on to someone else, but a solution. . . . [T]he solution was a decision and so now I am going home. I am not going away, but going home. He can follow, or he can stay, or he can do what he likes, but I have made a decision. . . ." (GWGS 83)

Doris resolves her problem, but Gallant does not allow even this character's last words to be optimistic: "Everybody makes someone

else pay for something, I don't know why. . . . Everyone does it. We all pay and pay for someone else's troubles" (GWGS 84).

Ironically, Flor's more complicated problem--that she is trapped by her mother and Bob--is likewise resolved by her decision to go home; she retreats, permanently, to an imaginary perfect past. In her dreams, Flor turns away from the sea: "She emerged in triumph from the little wood . . . and into her father's arms" (GWGS 85).

The last portion of the novel is narrated by the same character whose story begins it. George, a younger cousin whom Flor used to torment, arrives in Paris shortly after Bob and Bonnie have committed Flor to a convalescent home. In a grotesque evening out, George reports on the tattered remains of the survivors' relationships. Bonnie is recreating Flor in her mind with a mass of contradictory details that blur George's memories. She is blatantly, if unconsciously, cruel to Bob, remarking that everyone in Paris should be in love. Bob responds to any remark with "Don't worry" (GWGS 150-153). George is the one character left who is able to call up the real Flor. His childhood memory of how she deliberately broke a necklace of sea-colored beads over her head points back to a still vital Flor, caught in an inescapable predicament:

[T]he air was full of pigeons and bells and the movement of Flor breaking something because she wanted something broken: perhaps because she was going to be with Aunt

Bonnie for life. Sometimes it was as though Flor had never left his thoughts . . . at all. Because of her, the twin pictures, love and resentment, were always there, one reflecting the other, water under sky. (GWGS 19)

He once presented Flor with one of the beads as a reminder of her gesture. But Flor denied his recollection of her independent, rebellious gesture: "We don't remember the same things" (GWGS 20). And George ultimately denies his real memories of Flor: Bob appeals to him to visit Flor, but George, believing he is being considerate, and giving in to the authorities who have long insisted on accuracy over truth, reminds Bob that he met Flor only six times in his life. George's last memory of Flor becomes "an authentic hallucination" in which he merges Flor, her mother (the "queen in exile"), and a "ghostly" beauty who passes him on a bridge (GWGS 154). The old Flor is lost to memories unable to bear passion or vitality, and the remnants of George's memories become dead metaphors.

The interactions in all of these relationships form a pattern stifling any voice that threatens the cherished poses of the players. Flor does deviate from the mutually approved script and approaches a painful truth about all relationships: "Why didn't the man get up?" But given her established dependence on these relationships, she only entraps and isolates herself further--paradoxically able to escape her mother's hypocrisies only by descending into her own imagination.

Gallant's second novel also deals with collusion in human relationships. A Fairly Good Time is a more conventionally structured novel than Green Water, Green Sky, but lacks the impact of the earlier novel. There are too many characters and too much significant detail over which the author struggles to keep control. Thus, the intricately involved relationships here are confusing and the novel's implications dissipated.

The main character, Shirley, is a young Canadian living in Paris who has just been left by her second husband, Philippe. Her first husband, Pete, died on their honeymoon in Italy. The story of his death was first published as a short story, "The Accident" (October 1967), which is incorporated in Chapter 12 of the novel. Reacting against her mother, an inveterate do-gooder and liberal, Shirley has few illusions about life even before Pete's death: "It was a dirty little experiment . . . and we were given up long ago" (FGT 232). After Pete's death, Shirley becomes an inert element in said experiment. "[Pete's father] had drawn up a new way of life, like a clean will with everyone he loved cut out. I was trying to draw up a will too, but I was patient, waiting, waiting for someone to tell me what to write" (FGT 245).

Shirley marries Phillipe, a Parisian columnist, under two contradictory assumptions. First, she believes she has rescued him from living with his neurotic mother; in return, she believes he will "build a house for her, intellectually and sentimentally, and invite her inside" (FGT 50). She is disappointed, for

Philippe has already assigned the role of intellectual confidante to his protégée, Geneviève, who has convinced him the meaning of life lies hidden in Mother Goose rhymes. In fact, Philippe marries Shirley because she is pregnant with his child; shortly after their wedding, she has a miscarriage (FGT 49). Finding herself abandoned even within the structure of marriage, Shirley writes her mother for help. Their relationship, "an uninterrupted dialogue of the deaf" (FGT 45), elicits the response that one should not write while weeping because tears spoil penmanship (FGT 7).

Shirley follows the family tradition of being a rescuer. Her grandmother invited needy strays into her home, recited the Bible and preached temperance at them. Shirley's mother is a calm-minded agnostic: "native of a country that welcomed neither passion nor poetry, she was shown to be naturally endowed for both, but she had somehow made her daughter suspicious of either" (FGT 98). Shirley's suspicions are not unfounded; her mother, an attentive listener to the woes of those whose suffering she can confirm in poetry, "in Herrick, Bunyan or Pope," is never able to hear her daughter (FGT 101).

Unlike her mother and grandmother, Shirley has no structure to validate her role. Thus, her rescues inevitably turn into disasters: the victims she tries to help are reluctant to be rescued. Not only are they ungrateful, but they frequently end up victimizing Shirley. She brings a refugee home to use her phone; he tries to rape her (FGT 59). She helps her friend

Renata, involved with a sadistic neo-Fascist lover, obtain an illegal abortion--a considerable legal risk in Catholic France. Soon after, she nurses Renata through a suicide attempt; Renata maintains Shirley's motives are selfish:

"The whole experience was Shirley's. She wanted it. She followed me, watched me, soaked up everything I could have felt. All the while . . . pretending I needed her. She had time for me because all her time goes outside her own life. She hasn't a life. She'd rather live mine, or yours." (FGT 224)

Shirley appeals to St. Joseph--the "no one" in particular she speaks to in heaven--to change her life. St. Joseph provides Claudie Maurel (FGT 68). Shirley rescues this stranger when she cannot pay her restaurant bill, and subsequently returns Claudie to her family, the Maurels. She decides Claudie is a victim of her father's tyranny: Claudie's son, it is implied, is the result of incest (FGT 295). Although herself sexually attracted by Claudie's father, Shirley convinces Claudie she should be free. Claudie moves in with a pretentious young man unable to support her, who dreams of aiding refugees in the Lebanon camps--or, should those refugees be "ungrateful," in an Israeli kibbutz (FGT 201).

Even Shirley recognizes the young man is unsuitable, that Claudie is unfit for freedom, and that her rescue has gone wrong: "I gave her the wrong advice. It would have been good advice

where I come from, but it doesn't make sense here" (FGT 203). In need of money to abort yet another pregnancy, Claudie returns home with her father to become as passive as "the rouged and powdered dead" (FGT 302). The reader is thus left to recall Shirley's "only nightmare": "I am the rescuer. I am a rescue party. Yes, I save someone, anyone. . . . I walk in the streets with the victim, saved now, but no good to anyone. He is saved, but useless, a zombie" (FGT 217).

The ties between all the characters in the novel are knotted in ambiguity. Shirley's landlady, Madame Roux, once complicitous in snaring Philippe as Shirley's husband, later allies with Philippe to evict Shirley. Philippe and Geneviève's ludicrous platonic intimacy is matched by Shirley's empty sexual liaison with James, her Greek neighbor, who has not informed Shirley that Philippe has had her watched for evidence of adultery.

At the end of the novel, Shirley is excluded from all the relationships. Philippe divorces her; her mother dies, having given everything away--even Shirley's christening silver. Claudie's family is pitying and self-righteous, united against Shirley's lifestyle; Renata is in Gibraltar with her lover; the promiscuous James has returned to Greece to find a virginal bride. Madame Roux has let Shirley's apartment, now in Philippe's name, to a tenant she previously attempted to evict.

The scope of characters, events, and images in A Fairly Good Time makes the novel's thematic focus difficult to identify.

Furthermore, because Gallant chooses the limited omniscient point of view through Shirley, the motives of the many characters whom she becomes involved with remain obscure. So much of the novel's plot depends on her interaction with others that Shirley's limited and unreliable insights become a tiresome puzzle for the reader. Nonetheless, the ambiguous, inherently ironic relationships are consistent with the perspective presented in Green Water, Green Sky: characters drift together out of a need to be loved, to be understood, to play a role that offers them a sense of belonging to an ordered world. Shirley insists: "I live here. I have a house and furniture and . . . and a husband and all that. I'm not a tourist. I'm not somebody who keeps moving on. I'm somebody's wife" (FGT 199).

Two interesting thematic variations are introduced in this second novel. Relationships are still presented as static institutions, consisting at base of the roles oppressor and victim. However, in this novel, players interchange roles with dizzying frequency, still maintaining an equilibrium that keeps them from recognizing the real world has already thrown them off balance. Second, Gallant introduces Shirley as "rescuer" in this novel--a role that synthesizes those of oppressive protector and sympathetic fellow victim. The rescuer role provides an interesting variation in the pattern of interactions Gallant sets out in other works in this category. It provides Shirley with vicarious "real" experience, and an illusory sense of direction, which her life lacks. Unfortunately, the rescuer risks further disillusionment by interruption from the real world, since

complicity between rescuer and victim is fragile, short-lived, and based on mutually misapprehended motives. Neither participant would really accept the upheaval that a valid rescue would result in: freedom to act independently of others.

Shirley chooses Philippe because she thinks he will build her an intellectual house: he believes in ideas (FGT 50). She hopes to be heard over the ideas in this relationship; hopes to resolve what the relationship with her mother left unresolved. She wants a structure, a house from which she can play rescuer to others. A store guide, she likes to wear her uniform even when she is not at work (FGT 133). But Philippe wants her energies directed entirely at himself (FGT 128-129) and wants her to adhere to his plans, his schedule. Ironically, she too, like her mother, is not tuned in to his demands--and so he returns to his mother.

At the end of the novel, Shirley packs up the apartment she shared with Philippe, but finds she has no use for anything. Abandoned again, Shirley, it seems, will continue to drift. In a moment of rebelliousness, she writes a last note to Philippe, a tongue-in-cheek capitulation that Goosey Goosey Gander does indeed hold the key to profound meaning. But this is a small triumph. As the mailbox closes, her letter becomes "an irretrievable error." The novel ends with a series of ambiguous images. Passing the church of St. Pères, noticing the gutters full of fallen chestnut flowers and cigarette butts, she looks up at an extraordinary sky, the color "on the frontier of white and blue." She supposes she might meet Philippe again, "in dreams

and recollections." Like Flor's dreams, these do not offer much hope for the real future: she has had dreams of Pete in which he does not recognize her. She has survived once again, but all indications suggest that Shirley has still charted no course other than to drift, "waiting" for someone to forgive her, to approve of her, to tell her what to write.

Shirley is an ambiguous figure. Despite her insistence that she is competent (FGT 250), she envies people who know what bus to get on (FGT 43). We understand when she admits that she never wanted the independence she has (FGT 60); she, like Carol, Cissy, Louise, and Flor, is a victim of family and cultural patterns that do not jibe with the reality over which she tries to impose these arrangements. Although when the novel ends, Shirley is not locked into a relationship--as other characters are in this grouping of stories--she is locked into her role of rescuer and locked into searching for a certain type of relationship.

The relationships dissected in the short stories of this grouping share the same problems developed in the novels: oppression, martyrdom, manipulation by guilt, complicit deceptions. "Bernadette" (January 1957), a frequently anthologized Gallant story, is the epitome of this classification. The Knights, Robbie and Nora, are middle-class liberals living in Montreal in the 1950s. Nora is the oppressor in this relationship, qualified for the role by her remarkable vocabulary and a penchant for analyzing Robbie's behavior. She humors "Robbie" like a feverish child. The characters were originally attracted to one another

at a student political rally that had "something to do with the Spanish war" (MHB 18). Both are eager to escape the past: Nora wants to forget an ugly lower middle-class upbringing that, after she becomes politically active, she redefines proudly as working class. Robbie, on a search for his identity among "the people," and determined to be a playwright, rebels against his well-to-do conservative family.

The two cooperate in a bargain that resolves the internal conflict of each. Nora, the political crusader, wants to "change the world or at least Quebec" (MHB 37). The stumbling block to her quest is her "burning fear of poverty" (MHB 18). After marriage, Nora reconciles Robbie with his family and his father's firm. She fully realizes it was the firm that kept poverty away: it allows her to fight her tireless battles:

Nora's weapons were kept sharp for two dragons, crooked politics and the Roman Catholic Church. She had battled for birth control, clean milk, vaccination, homes for mothers, homes for old people, homes for cats and dogs. She fought against censorship, and for votes for cloistered nuns, and for the provincial income tax.

(MHB 15)

In return for her security, Nora nurtures Robbie's illusions about writing--though he has completed nothing, and has developed a deep suspicion of the English language. She creates such a "positive atmosphere of playwriting" in the house--talking about

his work, sharing his problems--"that many of his acquaintances thought he was a playwright and were astonished to learn he was the Knight of Turnbull, Knight, and Beardsley" (MHB 18).

Less smugly satisfied than his wife, Robbie embarks on a new quest:

[He began] summing himself up as a person, trying to find out what had determined the direction of his life. In college, he remembered, he had promised himself a life of action and freedom and political adventure. . . . [S]urely, he, Robbie Knight, should have moved on to something other than a pseudo-Tudor house in a suburb of Montreal. (MHB 24)

A confrontation with the past may lead Robbie to uncover his hypocrisy. However, Robbie cannot help telling Nora about his self-evaluation, "who promptly gave him the complete Orwell, bound in green" (MHB 25). Soon after, Nora plans a party to enlighten a visiting Belgian priest about the vicissitudes of the Catholic Church in Quebec. Consumed by self-pity when he is unsympathetically sent to bed with a fever, Robbie becomes wistful about Orwell's description of a "'working-class interior at its best'" (as quoted; MHB 25). In the romantic picture of father reading before the fire, mother sewing in her rocker and the children happily sucking humbugs, Robbie sees "everything missing in his life" (MHB 25). At this moment, Bernadette, their

servant-girl from Abitibi, appears with a tea-tray and makes his vision real:

[He] gripped Bernadette's plump, strong forearm. The room was full of warmth and comfort. Bernadette had brought this atmosphere with her; it was her native element. She was the world they had missed sixteen years before; and they, stupidly, had been trying to make her read books. (MHB 26)

In fact, the Knights have boasted about Bernadette's intellectual development. They have introduced her to Gide, Colette, Giraudoux. Only now, when she returns a Prix Goncourt that Robbie loaned her, with its pages still uncut, does Robbie recognize his pretensions: "he no longer liked the classic role he had set for himself, the kindly educator of young servant girls" (MHB 28-29). Instead, he exalts Bernadette as a symbol of action and hard work: "a look his own wife only achieved by seeming totally exhausted" (MHB 26).

Seduced by the unlikely conjunction of Orwell and Bernadette in his bedroom, Robbie does achieve insight into his hypocritical marriage. But Gallant insists her readers be more astute, and she demonstrates the ironic limitations of Robbie's awareness. Robbie, eager to confirm Orwell's scene, asks Bernadette to describe her kitchen, but he never sees the picture Bernadette presents to the reader.

The table, masked with oilcloth, was always set between meals, the thick plates turned upside down, the spoons in a glass jar. At the centre of the table, never removed, were the essentials: butter, vinegar, canned jam with the lid of the can half opened and wrenched back, ketchup, a tin of molasses glued to its saucer. In winter the washing hung over the stove. By the stove, every year but the last two or three, had stood a basket containing a baby--a wailing, swaddled baby, smelling sad and sour. . . . As a child she had watched an infant brother turn blue and choke to death. She had watched two others die of diphtheria. . . .

Bernadette's mother did all she could; terrified of injections and vaccines, she barred the door to the district nurse. She bound her infants tightly to prevent excess motion, she kept them by the flaming heat of the stove. . . . When Bernadette thought of the kitchen at home, she thought of her mother's pregnant figure, and her swollen feet, in unlaced tennis shoes.

(MHB 27)

Bernadette is unknowingly a vehicle for Robbie's insight and disillusionment with his marriage; but as a symbol of idyllic peasantry she is a truly ironic figure. Further, Robbie's moment of epiphany as a result of feeling close to Bernadette is short-lived. Aware his touch frightened her, he follows her to the kitchen to apologize. Bernadette reeks of chemical cleaner, and Robbie "no longer felt the atmosphere of warmth and

food . . ." (MHB 29). Nor does Bernadette understand his purpose: "His apology sent her off into the strange swamp world in which there was no footing; she had the same feeling as when they tried to make her read books. What was he sorry about?" (MHB 29). Defeated and suddenly terrified that this scene may be analyzed by Nora, Robbie retreats.

Bernadette also inadvertently forces Nora to acknowledge her hypocrisy. Nora entertains her guests by outlining Bernadette's life before she came to the Knights--who have, Nora believes, rescued her from ignorance and superstition. Unfortunately, the Belgian priest asks Bernadette about death, and Bernadette's answers, involving pink and white angels singing hymns in the sky, belie her new intellectual status and ruin the party. Worse, a guest points out to Nora Bernadette's obvious pregnancy.

Tears of fatigue and strain came into [Nora's] eyes. She felt that the failure of last night's party had been a symbol of the end. . . . Robbie was afraid of her and liked humiliating her by demonstrating again and again that he preferred nearly any other woman in bed. That was the truth of things. Why had she never faced it until now? (MHB 37)

Both characters, because of Bernadette, are confronted by their hypocrisies, their failed ideals. This indicates potential change: in Robbie's words "a different basis" for their marriage (MHB 17). But not only have the two long deliberately avoided

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threats to the world they have established, their interactions have become so habitualized that together they have no capacity for change. For example, suspecting Robbie of impregnating their servant, Nora tries to shatter his complacency (actually incomprehension) by telling him she has dreamed of his death. Robbie is unshaken--Nora has forgotten she's often used this play before (MHB 37).

Robbie is outraged by the accusation and momentarily their usual roles reverse: Nora is on the defensive. But his response, laden with conditionals and possible actions in the past tense, demonstrates his impotence:

Anger paralyzed him. He was unable to think of words or form them on his tongue. At last he said, "It's too bad when I'm angry I can't do anything but feel sick. Or maybe it's just as well. . . . If I'd hit you then I might've killed you." (MHB 39)

Nora quickly resumes the oppressor role. Since Robbie apparently feels guilty about something, "she felt morally bound to make him pay. 'Will it be expensive?' Robbie asks innocently" (MHB 40). The reader need not ask. The characters' glancing collisions with reality and their inevitable retreat from insight, back to the comfortable deceptions of their relationship, is indeed costly.

The figure of Bernadette specifies the cost: the sacrifice of vitality. In the last scene of the story, Bernadette watches a

movie about an implausible reconciliation of lovers after thirty years. She identifies not with the heroine, but with those minor movie characters who look on. "She believed in love," though she has never experienced it, or seen it around her, and does not expect it to happen to anyone she knows (MHB 41). Suddenly, her child moves, and she realizes it is real: "something to be given a name, clothed, fed, baptized" (MHB 41). But still, it will require no action on her part:

Where and how and when it would be born she did not question. Mrs. Knight would do something. Somebody would. It would be born, and it would die. That it would die she never doubted. . . . When it died, it would pray for her, and her alone, for all of eternity. . . . Oddly secure in the dark, the dark of the cinema, the dark of her personal fear, she felt protected. . . . She saw, as plainly as if it had been laid in her arms, her child, her personal angel, white and swaddled, baptized, innocent, ready for death. (MHB 41)

As a parody of Gallant's own "naturalistic" characters--like Sylvie and Isobel--who contrast the pretensions of those around them, Bernadette is an artistic triumph. She does contrast the hypocritical Knights, and her state of grace at the end of the novel renders her a less ridiculous figure than Nora, the failed crusader, or Robbie, the wordless playwright. She has also served as an agent of insight for them both. But she sits as a

spectator of other spectators, almost bestial in her passivity, a symbol of inertia, not action, as Robbie presumed. Her superstitious faith in love is abstract; it will never involve her; her only association with vitality--her moving child--she perceives as almost immediately dead. The missed epiphany in "Bernadette," for all three characters, is incorporated in this image of "stillbirth": vital forces are seen to be incapable of thriving in the context they are born into--the intellectually concocted world of the Knights, or the Church dominated world of superstitions in which Bernadette sits, waiting.

Other short stories demonstrate this pattern of complicitous relationships that secure individuals away from reality. In "New Year's Eve" (January 1970), a jaded married couple tolerates a visit from a friend of their late daughter. Depressed over a recent divorce, Amabel wants to be "adopted" by the couple she remembers as loving and kind. All three characters are at cross purposes. Amabel's proposed visit leaves the wife staring at the husband "as if they were strangers in a crush . . . and her earring had caught on his coat" (The End of the World 134). On New Year's Eve, at the opera, Amabel thinks she might replace their lost daughter, but the two have long ago given away all their reminders of Catherine. Mrs. Plummer has spent years trying to make her husband feel guilty for leaving her once, before their daughter's death: "It is useless to say it serves you right . . ." (EW 132). New Year's Eve, she counts up how much money she has saved in order to leave him, and goes over her memorized speech of farewell. "But of course she would never be

able to leave him. . . . She felt a complicity with her victim" (EW 136).

Mrs. Plummer leans over, touching her husband in order to get his attention; Amabel perceives a loving conspiracy, and is envious. Meanwhile, Colonel Plummer is eavesdropping on two Russian girls talking of love and happiness, whose experiences obsess him throughout the entire evening. At the end of the opera, the Plummers drive "back to the heart of their isolation, where there was no room for a third person; but the third person knew nothing about this, and so for Amabel the year was saved" (EW 141).

The same pattern of individuals bound together, each isolated and paralyzed by resentment or false memory of the past is repeated in "Malcolm and Bea" (March 1968). Malcolm considers leaving his sadistic wife and stagnant marriage. But the thought of being in charge of his own future stops him. He could jump off the train. "And then what? 'No,' he said aloud" (EW 119). A moment later he rationalizes his denial to his step-son and himself: "Well, Roy . . . half the people in the world don't even get as far as I did just now" (EW 119).

"In the Tunnel" (September 1971) is another story that features paralysis. A young Canadian woman in France moves in with an older man for an extended sexual relationship. When she injures her ankle, he is repulsed by its ugliness; to her role of martyr, he plays unfeeling lover. Their last outing is an

ill-fated excursion to see frescoes of Judas and Jesus on a mouldy church wall. She keeps a postcard to remind her of the image of Judas "with his guts spilling and with his soul . . . reaching out for the Devil" (EW 166). Though abused by her lover that day, "it was she, the victim, who felt guilty and maimed" (EW 166). Her identification with the suffering Judas shows her choice of the victim role and her self-betrayal. Nor do we hold much hope for her future: at the end of the story she mails the card to impress "a man she was after" (EW 166).

"Potter," the story of a man who rejects a woman he has idealized for years, once she is rejected by another man, is similar to "In the Tunnel." Also in this grouping is "His Mother"; in this story, an expatriate son and his mother, through their letters, engage in creating memories of a relationship that never existed when they sat together in prolonged silence over the breakfast table. Their mutual self-deception brings both of them esteem within their separate communities.

In "The Moslem Wife" (August 1976), Netta, who has married her cousin Jack, has a relationship so narcissistic it is difficult for the other characters to decide who is the oppressor and who is the victim. At the beginning of the story, Netta, who has married in order to be able to have intercourse every night (FFD 39), is a character incapable of passion, imagination, and action. Only one action stands out in her memory--that she kicked Jack as a child, leaving him permanently subject to bouts of loss of balance (FFD 40). Jack, a philanderer and

dispassionate lover, leaves her and the hotel they own in southern France for another woman and does not return for some five years, when the war is over.

Netta has taken to reading poetry. She has gained more imagination than she is comfortable with, and "an accurate, a deadly memory" (FFD 72). Her experiences under Fascist rule in the war have developed her character into one that acknowledges tragic contradictions. She remembers the lonely Italian boys, missing their mothers, who were later hanged in front of the village coffee shop, convicted as murderous partisans. Despite her obvious character development, Netta identifies the impotence of memory: "Memory is what ought to prevent you from buying a dog after the first dog dies, but it never does. It should at least keep you from saying yes twice to the same person" (FFD 73).

Sitting in a bar, Netta is confused by images of light. Candlelight reflected in tears brings memories of candlelight in the war: "they were real" she tries to convince herself (FFD 73). But Jack, bearing no real memories after a five year holiday in America, blinds her with "the light of imagination" (FFD 73). Nora sees the sun hit the mirror as Jack recalls happier memories than Netta. For Jack, the flash in the mirror is no mere reflection, but the first light of morning (FFD 74). The wave of revulsion Netta feels when Jack first requests that she take him back suddenly recedes, "sucked back under another wave--a powerful adolescent craving for something simple, such as true love" (FFD 73).

Again, Gallant's characters choose stifling, predictable structures over the risks and the pain of real experience, and become passive players in a script that others write. Unlike Carol, who rewrites her own memories, Netta has her memories reconstructed for her by her unfaithful, long-absent husband: "Later, Jack said that the walk with Netta back across the Place Masséna was the happiest event of his life. Having no reliable counter-event to put in its place, she let the memory stand" (PFD 74).

CHAPTER IV

"SMALL POSSIBILITIES": SOCIAL STRUCTURES, SOCIAL LIES

The fictional works examined thus far demonstrate what Gallant in her first novel designates "the human collapse"--as distinct from "social collapse" (GWGS 139). "Human collapse" refers to the debasement of insight and memory that results when an individual distorts the meaning of real events. This distortion, or reconstruction of reality, results when the individual imposes upon real events an artificial system of values he has internalized--such as middle-class values. Thus, in "The Other Paris," Carol shies away from the real Paris because it contradicts her preconceptions not only about the city, but about love, relationships, and the social order she believes exists. In "Bernadette," both Robbie and Nora believe they work for social causes, but their intellectual detachment keeps them comfortably unaware of what real poverty is--even though, in the person of Bernadette, the effects of poverty are right before their eyes.

The characters of Gallant's early stories survive the clash between real experience and what they have always believed the real world to be by virtue of their distorted memories, but nonetheless they are stunned, confused, and, often, literally handicapped. The cost of distorting reality is apparently not only diminished insight, but some degree of paralysis.

The actions of these characters are limited by what their own script predetermines, or by reaction to a partner's cue. Some characters, like Shirley, are so shocked by reality that they have lost their scripts, and drift from one encounter to another, looking for a comfortable role. Comfort is a key word here, for the characters are distinctly uneasy when faced by any situation that challenges their notions. Not surprisingly, Gallant shows their imaginative faculties to be atrophied. They are incapable of spontaneous action--action that is motivated only by immediate perception of reality. Thus, their human potential for action, which springs from uniqueness and unpredictability, is sacrificed.

The stories to be discussed in this chapter explore not only the human but the social collapse, where diminishing capacity for insight and spontaneous action occurs on a global level. Critics sometimes refer to these as her political stories, and the category includes various pieces from several of her collections, as well as the entire collection entitled The Pegnitz Junction (1973). Though they are for the most part set in Europe after World War II, Gallant has stated the original purpose behind these stories was to explore the origins of Fascism (Hancock 40-41). Her focus is not the historical causes of Fascism, but rather how systematized individuals, like those presented in her other stories, collectively constitute a sinister social and political force whose main features are self-deceit and inertia. In earlier stories, such as "The Cost of Living," in which Louise falsifies her accounts, the primary focus was on the private

deceits of individuals; in the stories under discussion here, exaggerated statistics are perpetrated on an entire nation, false memories on an entire generation.

What marks Gallant's purpose in stories of this third classification distinct from those analyzed previously is her manipulation of fictional elements. First, the tone of these stories is ominous--heavy irony is characteristic here, and the mood is markedly darker than in earlier stories.

Second, cultural collisions, which in the groupings examined thus far provide mainly a setting to mirror an individual's conflicts, in these stories figure as important conflicts in their own right. The clashes between different cultures are often represented by the central images of the stories--the threatening sea in "The Four Seasons" (June 1975), the relics of the fleeing Jews in "The Latehomecomer" (July 1974), the meandering train in "The Pegnitz Junction" (first published in The Pegnitz Junction, 1973). The historical conflicts referred to in these stories do not function simply as a framework; they function rather like scenes on a film subjected to multiple exposure. The conglomerate picture is confusing, but as the reader differentiates each level of conflict--individual, interpersonal, socio-political--it becomes easier to see how each level pertains to the others, and how the environment of the characters becomes increasingly threatening.

The third characteristic that sets these stories apart is that the incompetent authorities--most often parents or spouses in previous categories--figure in this grouping as agents of political force. Sometimes the authority is identified as a specific historical figure (e.g. Mussolini in "The Four Seasons"), but more often the authority is an anonymous face representing complex hierarchy. In "An Alien Flower," for example, Julius, a chemist, epitomizes the rising tyranny of modern technocracy; in "The Old Friends," a police commissioner tries to rationalize past persecution of Jews by concluding that most of it took place on German soil. And although these characters may be farcical or impotent in some ways, as oppressors they are frighteningly able.

Finally, although the make-up of the characters seen in the rest of Gallant's fiction is repeated here, in this grouping the traits are translated to the collective level. Here, petty preoccupations do not just mark characters as ridiculous, or self-defeating. Their selfishness has more sinister implications: they complain about Hitler not because he persecuted and murdered masses with unmatched efficiency, but because he failed to fulfil his promise of pensions and jobs. Earlier characters prefer to act out predetermined roles that do not challenge their illusions; in The Pegnitz Junction stories, whole classes comply to maintain the status quo--economic, social, political. Earlier characters fear passion; that fear translates here into mass obsession with propriety and a unanimous policy of "no involvement."

Earlier characters retreat from their perceptions of reality and reconstruct their memories; in the political stories, Gallant focuses on mass social amnesia; that is, forgetting by mutual accord. Individuals deaf to the truth of their dreams translate, in these stories, to social groups unheeding of those few voices of social conscience who understand the meaning of real events. In "The Four Seasons," a priest is warned that sermons about moral courage are "slippery ground"; a German murdered for ripping down Nazi posters is refuted by his widow because his heroism comes "too late" for her to benefit materially; in "An Alien Flower," Bibi is forbidden alcohol in public because it makes her recall the past.

In summary, this chapter explores what Gallant believes are the global consequences of hypocrisy and indulgence. Her fiction confirms Russell Jacoby's observation in Social Amnesia that the "inability or refusal to think back takes its toll in the inability to think" (3). Furthermore, her characters demonstrate that motivations from perceptions of experience distorted by intellectual abstractions and obsolete values systems lead to senseless destruction.

Finally, in the stories cited here, Gallant clarifies what her earlier fiction implies about the relationship between memory, morality and materialism. Gallant shows in these stories that the capacity to act independently of artificial values is contingent upon a true perception of events. These characters--representative of the entire German nation-- already

feel unfairly victimized by the confrontation of national illusion with reality, and, having survived, are determined to hold fast to what remains. Real experience has threatened their material comforts as well as their illusions, and thus the characters are obsessive about material gain. In fact, these stories seem to foreshadow the emerging post-War industrial world's preoccupation with material goods.

Ironically, however, we note their materialism to be just another symptom of the same selfishness that earlier blinded them to the ultimate consequences of Hitler's policy. Material security in these stories does not lead to independent action, since real action involves intercourse with the real world, which these characters are intent on avoiding.

Action, insist Russell Jacoby and Hannah Arendt, is intrinsically a public matter. To have meaning for any man, deeds must be thought about (not reconstructed) in men's minds: "without this thinking completion after the act, without the articulation accomplished by remembrance, there simply [is] no story left [to] be told" (Arendt 6). In other words: "Remembrance alone, the retelling of their deeds as stories, can save the lives of men from oblivion and futility . . ." (Margaret Canovan on Hannah Arendt, 60). Gallant portrays a world where public acknowledgment is denied those individuals who have accomplished deeds that will lead to change, that will destroy the status quo. Their voices are drowned out by the infantile whine of characters so focused on petty contexts that they fail

to notice approaching cataclysm. These radical figures--the priest in "The Four Seasons," the martyred father in "The Latehomecomer," Bibi in "An Alien Flower," and even the spectre of Bonhoeffer in "The Pegnitz Junction"--are not allowed to survive in, let alone influence, their environment. Their grounding in the real past is dissolved by the characters around them, who are complicitous in mass amnesia and sham.

"The Four Seasons" (June 1975) is an excellent example of the distinction that separates the kind of stories analyzed in the last chapter from those that are grouped for discussion here. Superficially, the situation in this story parallels that of "Bernadette": in "The Four Seasons," the stagnant lives of a middle-class couple, the Unwins, are revealed by their au pair, an Italian peasant girl. The trivial conflicts the Unwins play out in their marriage and in their relations with the community of Castel Vittorio are doubly ironic. They stage their little plays within the far more ominous drama of real events in early Fascist Italy, but the characters are as unconscious of the coming devastation as they are to the fact that their own struggles are a farce.

The Unwins' union is based in sin and exploitation. Mrs. Unwin has deserted her first husband and child. After living "a holiday life" for years she has a nervous breakdown, and although by that time the two are "so far apart she had no claim on [him]," Mr. Unwin marries her and moves to northern Italy to provide her therapy (FFD 33). A neurologist recommends a

pregnancy "to remove the guilt," and the twins Tessa and Clare are born (FFD 33). Now the victim of fierce headaches caused by pollen, sunshine, and strong perfume--and, Gallant suggests, the "stuff" she sips from teacups--Mrs. Unwin is physically incapable of caring for her toddlers (FFD 4, 33).

The Unwins' social pretensions within the community are matched by those of its other members. Furthermore, their shortsightedness is comical, given most readers' historical knowledge: Mrs. Unwin is pleased with Mussolini for "getting rid of" such vulgarities as pierced ears and oversized families (FFD 5); Miss Barnes, a community leader, declares, "Hitler will never make the Italians race minded. They haven't it in them. . . . Latins talk, but they would never hurt a fly" (FFD 23).

Two characters point out the English community's sense of immunity from reality. A new Anglican pastor, the "Padre," becomes the voice of truth and moral principle, but his audience is comfortably deaf. Two of his initial suggestions symbolically indicate that the community is out of step with the times of the real world: he proposes to repair the slow church clock and return the Evensong service--now inexplicably celebrated at lunch hour--to evening. His parishioners' overreaction indicates they have some sense of what he really intends: "'Do not become involved with anything,' [Miss Barnes advised]. . . . 'Right!' screamed Mrs. Unwin. . . . 'For God's sake, Padre . . . no involvement!'" (FFD 21). After the Padre reminds them they are at war, the group's cooperation in denial is even clearer.

"We?" said Miss Barnes.

"Nonsense, Padre," said Mrs. Unwin, briskly. "Read the newspapers."

"England," said the clergyman and stopped. (FFD 21)

Carmela, an au pair, also functions to satirize the ignorant complacency of the English. Carmela's fear of the sea is first perceived by the reader to be naive and superstitious. "'What happens when the sea comes out? . . . Up out of where it is now'" she asks (FFD 8). Assured that it stays where it is, her instincts are nonetheless proven right: the sea becomes an image of sinister forces spilling out of limits, of "grey adhesive shadows" of hostility between Italians and foreigners, of refugees' desperate attempts to be smuggled to safer ports in fishing boats, of imminent war.

Carmela reveals truth to the reader, but she is not an agent of insight for the Unwins. Their relationship, appropriately, reflects the cultural collisions around them: a sense of mutual suspicion and intrigue prevails. Carmela pretends she cannot speak English, introduces her brother to them as a beggar she has never met, and lies outright when Mrs. Unwin asks her if she has seen refugees at the border. Relieved by Carmela's denial, the Unwins again perceive the ominous as trivial. Mrs. Unwin blames the plight of the refugees on the Padre: "'He preached about tolerance once too often. It worked the Italians up.' She repeated to her husband Miss Barnes's opinion, which was that Mussolini did not know what was going on" (FFD 27).

One incident emphasizes that petty quarrels render characters blind to graver conflicts. The Unwins bring a civil suit against the Marchesa, the owner of a flowering tree whose scent torments Mrs. Unwin. Before the decision on the lawsuit, the Marchesa, the American widow of an Italian, returns home. Soon after, Mrs. Unwin wins her case and hires a man to do the pruning. It is a small triumph, "for the Marchesa was not there to watch," and in any case, Mrs. Unwin suddenly questions whether or not the tree is "responsible" for her discomfort (FFD 28).

But in the morning, when the man came with an axe and a saw, he would not be dismissed. He said, "You sent for me and I am here." . . . He hacked a hole through the hedge and began to saw at the base of the datura.

"That's not our property!" Mrs. Unwin cried.

The man said, "You hired me and I am here," and kept on sawing. On the road where the chauffeur had walked the Marchesa's dogs, a convoy of army lorries moved like crabs on the floor of the sea. (FFD 28)

The destructive forces are now beyond the reach of the authority who called them up, without motive, reason, or limit. Function has been sundered from purpose. Significantly, Gallant links this functionary's capricious destruction to the army lorries seemingly emerging from the sea, moving "like crabs," silent, threatening, and arbitrarily propelled.

"The Four Seasons" explores the global consequences of individuals caught up in petty conflicts whose resolutions are meaningless anyway. Two central incidents at the end of the story reinforce this. Mr. Unwin and the Padre, having spent all night at the police station, where they are advised to leave Italy, meet in an ice-cream parlor. The Padre confides that letters written about him were sent to the police, and Mr. Unwin, suspecting his vindictive wife, awkwardly tries to explain how he came to marry her. The Padre's words and Unwin's overlap but there is no meeting of the minds:

"Forget about believing in your life," said the younger man. "Think about the sacraments--whether you believe in them or not. You might arrive in a roundabout way. Do you see?"

"Arrive where?" said Mr. Unwin. "Arrive at what? I never get up in the morning without forcing myself to get out of bed, and without tears in my eyes. . . . If ever I had taken a day in bed nothing would have made me get up again. Not my children, not my life, not my country." (FFD 33)

So focused is Unwin on injustices suffered and private guilts suppressed that he remains incapable of turning outward to ideals or principles that might offer him a basis for independent action.

The Unwins are soon to leave Italy on a coalboat; the Padre, standing on principle, promises to remain despite inevitable imprisonment. Though morally more admirable than Unwin, the Padre's isolated act will ultimately not be constructive. He himself ruefully points out his limited influence in the parish after Carmela thanks him for the ice cream by saying she has just "eaten her way into heaven." "'Then I haven't entirely failed,' the clergyman said" (FFD 34).

Finally, Carmela's last memory shows her perceptions, too, are limited by personal concerns. She recalls the sight of the Unwins' doctor marching at gunpoint in a refugee line. She had looked at him in shame and apology, and he waved to her with "one smile, one gesture, one man's calm blessing" (FFD 35). The gesture is one of forgiveness; it absolves a young girl from association with a sinister process that she does not understand and cannot control. But the memory is an ironic one--Carmela believes Dr. Chaffee forgives her for leaving untouched a bottle of iron pills he insisted she must take.

This story's title alludes to the environment of individuals who are locked inside monotonous cycles, uncomprehending of the cataclysmic events that threaten them. As an artistic image, the four seasons commonly suggest an immutable and regenerative order in life; in this story, Gallant warns that the cycles can also represent insularity and entropy: "'No escape from it--marriage, childbirth, patriotism, the dark. The same circle--baptism, confirmation, prayers for the dead. Or else, silence'" (FFD 14).

"An Alien Flower" is another story collected in The Peggitz Junction; it explores another kind of silence--the silence a whole society imposes on its memories. The situation parallels that of "The Four Seasons" and "Bernadette": again a common servant girl serves as intermediary for a married couple whose union is motivated by selfishness. The dynamics among the three main characters suggest the process by which a whole class or nation distorts the truth. The main characters, Helga, Julius, and Bibi (self-named "refugees" from the past), each demonstrate a different way of escaping it. Helga, the snobbish and frigid narrator, marries Julius in order to wall herself up inside a shiny house safe from past ruins: "I believed, because he said it, that we would not live among ashes forever, and that he would give me a new, beautiful house" (PJ 173).

Throughout the story Helga is determined to keep her windowpanes intact, and her method of subverting unattractive truth is deliberate suppression of memory. Given that the process of suppression is conscious, our narrator reveals a schizoid personality. This device--the character revealing real and imposed visions of her experience--makes her real memories of "ashes" available to the reader. "[I] saw my mother running out of a burning house with her hair on fire. Her hands and face were like black paper when she died" (PJ 182). Her beautiful house is the only barricade she has against these memories (and we are reminded of Shirley's need for a house, too, in A Fairly Good Time). Helga continues to suppress any insights into her present circumstances which would threaten her home's stability.

Thus, even when she finds irrefutable evidence that Julius has lovers, and that Bibi, their housekeeper, is one of them, she ignores the situation and rationalizes her denial:

I had absolutely no one but Julius, and nowhere to go. Moreover, as I have said, I did not want to live without him. . . . I could have said to Julius, "I know about Bibi and you." What next? Bibi then departs and Julius and I are alone. He knows I know, which means we live in ruins and ashes forever. (PJ 176)

Taking into account the Fascist leaders just then purged from Europe, Helga's attitude toward Julius has heavy, ironic overtones: "I knew that Julius lied sometimes, but so do all divinities. Divinities invented convenient fables and they appeared in strange disguises, but they were never mistaken" (PJ 173). Here Helga articulates another variation of Gallant's distinction between truth and accuracy: Julius lies outright about his mistresses, but since his self-scripted role includes the promise of a new house and a new Germany, she cannot afford disbelief. Thus, she offers no challenge when he dismisses one lover's diary as a work of the imagination. Again, truth is a victim of personal fiction. The global implications are obvious.

Helga's self-deception involves not only her own memories and events in her present life; she tries to suppress others' memories as well. When Bibi, the helper who lives with Helga and Julius, refers to concentration camps and executions, Helga

reacts by ruling that Bibi is not to drink alcohol when company is present because "[she] could not expect Julius's guests to abandon their own homes and their own television to hear nothing but disjointed anecdotes" (PJ 180).

The reference to the guests' homes suggests that Helga believes houses function for others as they do for her--to wall out ugly memories. Again Gallant evokes Germany's real past by pointing out the consequences of walling out the truth: "Our marriage was our house. I said to myself, 'Here we are in the fortress. The bodies pile up outside. Don't look at them'" (PJ 188).

Julius, too, suppresses memories and believes talking about the tides of history wastes mental energies (PJ 172). Believing that the past is no longer part of the scenery, Julius is determined to build a new Germany over the ashes of the old. He believes that the force of modern technology is the route to prosperity free of reminders or remorse:

Possner was . . . Julius. . . . Possner was a small industrial complex then . . . but to Julius it was a force in the nation, an elite army for which he enlisted the best of recruits. . . . He knew he would go up and up as this new army grew. I knew it too. . . . (PJ 170)

The military language is significant. Julius begins as a "lieutenant" in this industrial army and ends up a "general." Parallels between Julius, who represents technocracy, and former leaders of Fascism are numerous. Helga warns us that like all authorities who identify themselves with a cause, Julius and Possner are not to be joked about. Ironically, Julius compares his mission at Possner to "the highly spiritual mission" of those who suffered in the concentration camps (PJ 182). Thus, Gallant ingeniously criticizes the military structure of Germany's past as well as warns us about the technocratic structures just then developing.

A leader, Julius takes on protégés--first Bibi, then Michael--young people whom he can mold and inspire with his goal. Michael, Julius's devoted follower, articulates the most chilling parallel between Julius's technocracy and Fascist ideology: unrestricted power and efficiency divorced from any moral values.

Michael the sycophant said, "Why don't you send very efficient, well-trained men from Possner into politics? You could take someone promising . . . launch him in a good party--in fact launch several in all parties. Then no matter who was elected you would be certain everything would run efficiently. . . ." (PJ 187-188)

Julius's equally chilling response is that this idea has already been considered, and, for reasons he does not explain, rejected. Obviously, he believes he does have the power to influence

Germany's future; and he sees himself as the divinity whose fables are accepted as truth. The function of Bibi in the story is to undermine and satirize this image of Julius.

Bibi is the voice of truth in "An Alien Flower." Though she has been corralled for Possner by Julius, she points out that Possner's mission is less than spiritual, "encouraging people to buy synthetic products they don't really need" (PJ 182). Bibi points out that Michael's proposal of political patronage is "immoral" (PJ 188). In response to a challenge from Helga's daughter, Bibi threatens to talk about morality in relation to the past, but is stifled by Julius who orders her not to "dare touch my daughter's innocence" (PJ 188).

Helga introduces Bibi as the alien flower of the story's title, and her description clearly echoes Fascist ideology:

My textbook of elementary biology in high school explained about the pure and the impure, beginning with plant life. Here was the picture of an upright, splendid, native plant, and next to it the photograph of a spindly thing that never bloomed, and that was in some way an alien flower. Bibi's round face, her calm eyes . . . she was different, she was "other." (PJ 173)

We learn nothing specific about Bibi's past, but Bibi nonetheless symbolizes the past (and the threatened, if not doomed, future). She is the only character who recalls true memories; she invests

objects with her history and rejects those that own the shiny "newness" which Helga desperately seeks:

Sometimes I took [Bibi's] handbag and dumped it upsidedown. I would get rid of the broken comb, the thumbled mirror, the pencil stubs, and replace all this rubbish with something clean and new. But she was miserable until everything became old, cracked, and "hers" again. (PJ 180)

Although she is the voice of truth--and therefore the real past, real memories--Bibi is defeated in this story. The alien flower of the beginning of the story creates at the end a type of decorative lily that Possner manufactures. Its roots "feed on a chemical mixture encased in a sphere." Outside this sphere, the lilies cannot survive. Bibi, lonely and unable to find spiritual nourishment in the "new" world that eschews memories, refuses to survive if survival requires that she remain walled in by a whole generation's lies. The "technological lily" is a harbinger of the failure of burgeoning technology to improve the world. It signifies the unfulfilled promise of technology--Julian's promise--to offer hope and a sense of purpose to the nations of people who had lost their's during the War. Bibi emigrates to America and soon after commits suicide by gassing herself.

"An Alien Flower" points out that technocracy may be no less dangerous a force than Fascism. The floating artificial lilies foreshadow Bibi's death, and are poised as a marker for the

cultural grave that Gallant suggests is to be dug by the emerging post-War industrial order being created by the formidable U.S.--where there is little history to bulldoze under or bury. Through Bibi emigrating to her death in America, Gallant signals a social doom in the burgeoning land of opportunity, ignorant or indifferent to the voice of conscience and historical truth.

Mass amnesia (social reconstruction of true events) is also the focus of "The Latehomecomer" (July 1974), which Gallant classifies with the stories in The Pegnitz Junction (Hancock 37). The story explores Germany's attitude toward the past, and the ultimate cost of national amnesia.

The main character of the story is Thomas Bestermann, a twenty-one year old German, a member of the Hitler Jugend from early boyhood. Taken prisoner in France before he is sixteen, he becomes a victim of incompetent officials. He cannot be evacuated after the War because his papers are lost and he thus has no legitimate existence. Five years after the War is over, Thomas returns to Berlin to live with his mother and her new husband, Martin.

Both the French and the German are hostile to this latehomecomer, and their attitude toward him reflects their attitude toward the past:

I was an embarrassment, too; my appearance, my survival, my bleeding gums and loose teeth, my chronic dysentery

and anemia, my craving for sweets, my reticence with strangers, the cast off rags I had worn on arrival, all said "war" when everyone wanted peace, "captivity" when the word was "freedom," and "dry bread" when everyone was thinking "jam and butter." (FFD 122)

Post-War survivors are eager to forget about victims, and Thomas's belated arrival is a reproach to the other characters' preoccupation with regaining material losses. In fact, Thomas is a young victim of the conformity and materialism of the grown-up world. Thomas's war wound is symbolic--his leg is misshapen, as though it had been "pressed the wrong way while the bones were soft" (FFD 121). Thomas's mother most resents the loss of income when her first husband is murdered for tearing down a Nazi poster. After his death she initiates her son's entrance into the Hitler Youth, whose financial stipend she believes will mean freedom for Thomas. Instead, Thomas tells us, it is just a different kind of trap. Finally, Thomas's mother marries Martin for economic security, and tries to justify her marriage by reconstructing the past, insisting that Thomas knew Martin in childhood, or Thomas's father did, or that the families shared graveyards close to one another (FFD 122-123).

Hypocrisy and amnesia are linked to materialism by other characters as well:

In their eyes the deepest failure of a certain political authority was that it had enticed peace-loving persons

with false promises of work, homes, pensions, lives afloat like little boats at anchor; now these innocent provincials saw they had been tricked, and they were going back where they had started from. It was as simple to them as that--the equivalent of an insurance company's no longer meeting its obligations. (FFD 125-126)

Even Thomas's resentment of his captors is based on petty issues--he is angry that the administration will not pay his trainfare home to Berlin as is the right of all prisoners-of-war. The officials believed, "If I'd been left behind, then I was not a prisoner. . . ; I was a tourist" (FFD 133). By focusing on these selfish issues, the characters evade the implications of the real evils of the past, which figure only as vague shadows that Gallant expects the reader to identify.

Thomas observes that the people of post-War Berlin are elbowing for a place on the staircase, pushing aside "pedestrian traffic residue" (FFD 121). They are resentful people, hungry, even greedy, for the comforts of which the war has deprived them. His stepfather's friend, Willy, epitomizes their attitude. Martin jokes that Willy was "out of a black uniform and into the black market before you could say 'democracy'" (FFD 127). Thus preoccupied, neither Willy nor Martin refers to the date of Thomas's homecoming, one day after "old Adolf's birthday." Thomas explains: "I don't think they were avoiding it; they had simply forgotten" (FFD 126).

Their forgetting is a conscious, deliberate process, and every character participates.

[Willy] said he wanted to give me advice that would be useful to me as a latehomecomer. His advice was to forget. "Forget everything," he said. "Forget, forget. That was what I said to my good neighbor Herr Silber when I bought his wife's topaz brooch and earrings before he emigrated to Palestine. I said, 'Dear Herr Silber, look forward, never back, and forget, forget, forget.'" (FFD 134)

Willy prudently names his new daughter Gisela, a name divorced from the nation's past traditions. By common accord there is no mutual past, reports Thomas, and includes himself (FFD 125). Though he realizes what is happening, he too wants to be on the staircase leading to prosperity. "My father is probably a hero now," he reflects, but his mother counters that it is "too late for me" (FFD 134). Son and mother have both opted for the material security of Martin's apartment with its shiny brass nameplate. Thomas, staring at his resemblance to his father in the mirror, watches it fade as he vows that he will "hang on Martin like an octopus. He had a dependent now . . ." (FFD 136). And Thomas looks to the future, foretelling his eventual marriage to the baby Gisela, "all light and sheen, and she was the first person--I can even say the first thing--I had ever seen that was unflawed, without shadow. She was as whole and as innocent as a drop of water, and she was without guilt" (FFD 127).

But all does not augur well for those characters who seek to deny the past. For Thomas's future begins in an atmosphere steeped in the destruction of the past. Martin's first wife, Elke, is one of many killed when a bomb hit the apartment building. The rubble was bulldozed into the foundation when the building was renovated, so the essence of the past remains:

"This apartment has a musty smell, an old and dirty smell that sinks into clothes. After a time I shall probably smell like the dark parlor. The smell must be in the cushions, in the bed that pulls out, in the lace curtains. It is a smell that creeps into nightclothes" I thought, I shall get used to the smell, and the smell of burning in the stone outside. The view of ruins will be my view. Every day on my way home from school I shall walk over Elke. (FFD 136)

The story ends with an ironic scene in which Gallant reiterates the futility of attempting to build a future based on a past bulldozed underground. Thomas's mother insists they act out a childish ritual of holding a piece of silver and wishing on a new moon. She brings out a silver napkin ring left behind by the refugee tenants. Ironically, Thomas's wish as he holds this relic of Germany's past is that he might return to the moment on the train prior to his homecoming, where he is safely suspended between past and future rather than forced to deal with their collision.

"The Pegnitz Junction," the title story of the collection that focuses on Germany, is structurally the most complex of Gallant's works. While most stories in this category take place in the decade following World War II, this story is set in the mid-to-late sixties. "The Pegnitz Junction" explores the relationship between mass distortion of memory and moral or spiritual entropy, specifically of the generation born after the War. The characters live with the fragments of values systems and ideologies the War has shattered. They are living in a world of remains, and must step carefully in order to conserve those remains for themselves and their children--their future. The characters are consequently unable to transcend the past, and, in fact, are the generation making "reparations" for it. Since memories of the past have been repressed, there is, one character complains, "an absence of someone responsible" (PJ 55), and a whole generation is left confused not only about what happened in the past but about who is responsible, and who should feel remorse. The characters are further confused by the conflict of their perceptions of the post-War world with the perceptions their parents have left as a legacy. One protagonist, Herbert, for example, recalls his mother, arrested and put in a camp when he was three for supporting her pastor's objections to Nazi policies:

She died early and stayed in his mind as a bloated sick woman eating sugar and telling bitter stories--how the Slav prisoners were selfish, the Dutch greedy, the French self-seeking and dirty, spreaders of lice and

fleas. She had gone into captivity believing in virtue and learned she could steal. Went in loving the poor, came out afraid of them; went in for the hounded, came out a racist; went in generous, came out grudging; went in with God, came out alone. (PJ 13)

As for Herbert, he believes the French are the sole voice of culture in the world, but "he thought nothing of repeating his mother's remarks" (PJ 14).

The metaphor that dominates "The Pegnitz Junction" is a train rerouted because of fires along the track "which may have been deliberately set" (PJ 36). The mood of the story becomes increasingly threatening, especially as Germany's past is evoked:

Even the trains sounded sad, as though they were used to ferry poor and weary passengers--refugees perhaps. The cubicle [of the station] was as cold as a cellar; no sun; no natural light had ever touched the high walls. (PJ 15)

Gallant's characters are typically self-defeating and resigned. Christine and Herbert, Germans vacationing in Paris, are having a love affair. Herbert brings along his young son, and ends up sleeping with "little Bert" every night. Herbert's impotence is revealed most significantly by the journey home on the train. He will express his outrage, he says, by writing

letters to picture magazines, news commentators, but not to any part of the opposition press:

He wanted to throw rocks at official bungling, but the same rocks must not strike the elected government. His letter mentioned high-handedness, lives disrupted without thought or care, blind obedience to obsolete orders, pigheaded officials, buck passing, locked toilets, shortage of drinking water, absence of someone responsible, danger to health, indifference to others.

(PJ 55)

3 This disjointed list, which again calls up Germany's past, is not the only indication of fragmentation in Herbert's mind:

Suddenly Herbert begged her to marry him--tomorrow, today. He would put little Bert in boarding school; he could not live without her; there would never again be interference. Herbert did not hear what he was saying and his words did not come back to him, not even as an echo. He did not forget the promise, he had not heard it. Seconds-later it was as if nothing had been said.

(PJ 46)

Herbert's amnesia is so highly developed that he never needs to forget; the contradictions he has internalized leave the impulse to act (to marry Christine) entirely separate from any desire or motivation that would encourage him to make the action

real. Passion, indeed all strong feelings, are short-circuited in Herbert's mind; they belong to the real world and Herbert cannot allow them to threaten his *status quo*, the world of childish rules he shares with his son. That Herbert represents a nation's amnesia about political events Gallant makes even more clear: a plaque "commemorating a time of ancient misery" (emphasis added) on the train station wall in France prompts him to turn little Bert's head the other way (PJ 11). He confesses to Christine, "I can't protect him forever." It was a "sad, gnawing moment," but, Gallant writes, "once they were aboard the express to Strasbourg they forgot about it" (PJ 11).

Gallant is not trying to lay blame for the evils of Fascism on Herbert: what she suggests is that a mind which tries to hold and confirm profound contradictions is incapable of transcending past stupidities and incapable of real action. Herbert claims he accepts the cost of post-War "reparations" but points out that, being a toddler during the war, he is not guilty. When other Germans voice worry about where all the funds for reparation will come from, Herbert's intellectual acceptance of responsibility and his emotional rejection of it make for dark comedy:

"Don't worry," said Herbert. "The beneficiaries die younger than most other people. They die early for their age groups. Actuarial studies are reassuring on that point."

It was impossible for the two strangers to tell if Herbert was glad or sorry. (PJ 49)

Christine offers little more hope in terms of capacity for comprehension and action. She is a medium of information in this story, intuitively receiving messages from seven transmitters, each one outlining a story within the story. The first voice is a gluttonous old woman, a German émigrée in America now returned to bury her husband. In order to benefit from his will, she must water his grave--a vivid image of a nation trying to revive dead illusions about a tarnished culture. The other channels that Christine tunes into suggest other faces of the past--murder, opportunism, the indifference of the élite. When a tour leader recalls "the Adolf time" as a sad period for art, Christine hears the creaking thoughts:

There had been concerts, hadn't there? And the Ring cycle . . . and *The Magic Flute* . . . the various Passions, and the Ninth Symphony almost whenever you wanted it? . . . Plays, ballet--all that went on. Cranach, Dürer. . . . Surely the cultural leader must have meant that it was a sad time in general, especially towards the end. (PJ 70)

Christine's intuition would seem to make her a character more qualified for action than the confused, impotent Herbert. But Christine is only a medium--a passive receiver of information which she does not analyze, judge, or synthesize. Woodcock suggests that she "exchanges messages" in this story, but there is no reciprocity between characters. In fact, Christine tries to avoid what information she does get, calling it interference.

Gallant alerts us to Christine's limitations in the first paragraphs of the story:

She had a striking density of expression in photographs, though she seemed unchanging and passive in life. . . . She had heard a man say of her that you could leave her in a café for two hours and come back to find she was still smoking the same cigarette. (PJ 4)

Christine's is a mind that even though it has access to truth, has no ability to use it to enlighten decisions or actions in the present. Christine comes from a city where memory has been wiped out and built over--the bombed Baroque city is now "a pink and golden child" (PJ 3). Nonetheless, she has rare access to the truth of the past through the minds she overhears. Furthermore, she has a link to spiritual power--for Christine is engaged to marry a theology student. Gallant states Christine is at a "turning" in her life (PJ 4), but by the end of the story we know Christine is merely turning in circles, like Herbert, like the train. Her indecisiveness is proven by her own lack of direction in her affair with Herbert, and, in the last scene of the story, her refusal to choose a course of action at Pegnitz Junction.

"I'll read for a minute," she said. "Then we will have to do something else."

"What?"

"I don't know," she said. "Go out, or wait here."

I'm sorry to be so uncertain." He sat as near to her as when the room had been full. She opened her book and saw, "'The knowledge of good and evil is therefore separation from God. Only against God can man know good and evil.' Well," she said, "no use going on with that." (PJ 87)

The words are Bonhoeffer's, from a book Christine's fiancé has loaned her, and provide an ironic contrast in this scene. Bonhoeffer, an anti-Nazi martyr, acted on his beliefs and died because of them; Christine has given up trying to assess good and evil and chooses to sit still at a railway junction rather than try to find the train that could take her to her destination.

If Herbert proves that a mind trapped by the contradictions of the past leads to inertia, then Christine suggests that access to information alone does not guarantee enlightened action. For Christine's information suddenly changes, from snow crystals, dancing, to "dirty cinders . . . old and tarnished" (PJ 85). This old information comes appropriately from Herbert, and tells Christine he still loves his runaway wife. Christine deems the information useless. But of course Christine could make use of the information to decide between Herbert and her fiancé, which is why she agreed to the vacation in the first place.

Christine dismisses the quote from Bonhoeffer because there is "no use" trying to apply it. Morality is dependent on man's knowledge that he is separate from God. But, as Herbert's mother

tells us, God is not now just apart from us, but absent, having died with the unrealistic visions that were associated with Him. Morality, Gallant suggests, is inextricably bound up with men's actions, and is not created by authorities but wrested from the implications of real events and real deeds.

Cut off from the lessons that the real deeds of the past could teach, Christine's generation resorts to inaction, or wastes energy, like Herbert, on irrational, self-defeating actions in order to preserve what little is left of comfortable illusions. Thus, Christine remains at Pegnitz Junction, for fear she will lose her seat, even though little Bert rightly maintains that Pegnitz Junction is not as good as home.

Little Bert is accustomed to a world of promises and apologies, a world of inaction. The naive agent of irony in the novella, he annoys his father by hugging a bath sponge while a French innkeeper calls his family "Dirty Boches" (PJ 8). The sponge is christened "Bruno" and Bert keeps it with him for the entire trip. When the grown-ups start speculating about what Bruno is--a bear, a boy--Bert is offended. "'It's a sponge,'" he counters (PJ 18). Christine tells him stories about Bruno, but is frequently censured by Herbert: "No, no. . . . Nothing military" (PJ 18). At the end of Gallant's novella, Christine continues one of the stories she began earlier. The story involves Bruno's five brothers--all named Georg, after different godfathers, each pronounced differently to avoid confusion. Ronald Hatch suggests this story intimates the brotherhood of man

(103)--but there are darker implications, consistent with Gallant's observations about the family.

Giving five brothers the same name is ridiculous, of course, though Christine insists her story is true (PJ 53). "'Well, all that is confusing for children,'" Herbert protests, and he is right (PJ 53). The five brothers are all stamped with the past (their godfathers), all trapped by the sponge-like sameness cast for them by their family. The family of man is here presented not as a brotherhood of different men, but a conglomeration of men all with the same name, differences in pronunciation notwithstanding. It evokes, in fact, a later comment of Linnet Muir's: "[T]he promise of children all stamped with the same face, cast in the same genetic mold, seemed a cruel waste of possibilities" ("Varieties of Exile," HT 263).

A moment before Christine starts to tell this story to Bert, sitting, waiting for something to happen, she tunes into one of her contacts' minds. The old German émigrée to America thinks of her spoiled niece and wonders if learning to pronounce *th* in America made her a better Christian (PJ 88). Gallant's answer is clear: being able to pronounce something differently does not constitute change, or rebirth; it constitutes a superficial variation of a pattern imposed time and time again by one generation over the next--and, no matter how well enunciated, has little to do with effective communication.

CHAPTER V

PERSONAL REVOLUTION VS INTELLECTUAL CONSTRUCTION OF EXPERIENCE

The stories of The Pegnitz Junction, Gallant states, originated from her fascination with "the worm" that destroyed the structures of civilization in Nazi Germany (Hancock 40). Her choice of words is interesting, if ambiguous, for Gallant's stories imply that the barriers erected by civilizations are themselves the problem. Gallant's writing universally shows how the traditional patriarchal institutions constrain authentic, individual experience, and therefore social freedom. At every level--individual, domestic, public--society encourages stability by building structured institutions. Gallant portrays these institutions as petty hierarchies built on values and conventions that are resistant to change, and increasingly stagnant. These structures--by definition obsolete--thwart individual freedom and thus impinge upon the free evolution of every society. Maintaining order within such structures depends on categorizing individuals according to class, economic status, gender role, or cultural origin. Because these structures abhor change, they prove hospitable environments for the Fascist "worm" that ultimately destroys them. Nor are institutions imposed on innocent victims by autocrats: a society, a nation, in Gallant's stories may be manifestly oppressive, but the implication in her works is that larger institutions merely magnify what is wrong with smaller ones--in particular, the family.

Gallant says in the Hancock interview that she feels The Pegnitz Junction is her best work because it answers her questions about Fascism's "small possibilities in people" (41). The image of Bibi's death, and of Julius and Helga continuing a relationship inside the sterile, technological institutions built up to cover the ashes and ruins of Germany, is a chilling one for modern civilizations that revere high technology.

In the stories that followed The Pegnitz Junction--collected in From the Fifteenth District (1979), Home Truths (1981), and Overhead in a Balloon (1985)--Gallant has maintained her estimable literary skill and style. Her characters continue to be battered survivors of the post-War decades. These later stories also are consistent with the satirical vision Gallant has always demonstrated, in The Pegnitz Junction and other volumes. In the two most recent collections of her stories, Gallant seems, first, to be exploring specific contexts in greater detail (series of stories set in Montreal, rural Quebec, Paris) and the patterns these contexts cast on individuals. Second, she seems to be more interested in the concept of "individual revolution," the attempt to escape from the patterns inflicted by one's family and culture. (In this sense, too, Gallant defines the difference between art--the writer's authentic voice--and artifice--a fictional pattern imposed on reality by the author in order to answer real questions, resolve real conflicts.)

The stories to be examined in this chapter indicate, in the first place, that only when traditional structures--like the

family--are broken down is any individual capable of free action; second, that literary or academic institutions in society are no less subject to stagnation and moral decay than any other kind of institution; third, that writers are no more apt to be able to tell or apply truth more effectively than anyone else; and, finally, that the breaking down of structures is achieved most effectively by a disorderly--usually feminine--principle.

All these contentions are confirmed in the story "Irina" (December 1974). "Irina" is remarkable in that, for once, its main character is not satirized. Gallant admits that "there is a great deal of myself in [Irina]" (Hancock 47). Ronald Hatch deems the story transitional, a departure from her other works (104), and, with qualifications, his point can be supported. First, Gallant begins in this story an analysis of the purposes and process of writing that she continues in the Linnet Muir and Magdalena stories. Second, Gallant posits, however fleetingly, an authentic ideal of individual freedom and revolution in these stories, ideal "revolutionary" relationships that can set one flying toward sunny heights. Against Irina, we see all the Gallant characters who fail to climb the slope; on the basis of Irina, we sense what revolution for Gallant's characters must really entail. This concept of revolution is central to her most recent works, to the two series of stories in Home Truths (the Linnet Muir sequence) and Overhead in a Balloon (the Magdalena sequence). Both series focus on writers recollecting their wartime experiences and their attempts at revolution--attempts to act free of familial and cultural

repressions. Why one writer succeeds and one fails, and what effects this failure sets in motion for other characters are philosophical puzzles Gallant presents to us.

In "Irina," Gallant inverts the telescope through which she has observed the Unwins and their ilk who, so caught up in their domestic quagmire, do not notice the tidal wave of political history on their doorstep. So focused are they on petty issues that they ignore real upheaval in the larger society within which they live. In "Irina," and the Magdalena and Linnet Muir series, the other extreme is true. Characters intent on playing a liberating role in the greater society ignore the practical consequences of their "heroic" causes for the people immediately around them. The ability to intellectualize about freedom and revolution is not by itself a potent force. Witness Richard Notte, a European literary star, Irina's late husband:

His moral and political patterns were fossils of liberalism. He had seen the cracks in the Weimar Republic. He had understood from the beginning what Hitler meant. If at first he had been wrong about Mussolini, he had changed his mind even before Croce changed his, and had been safely back on the side of democracy in time to denounce Pirandello. He had given all he could, short of his life, to the Spanish Republicans. His measure of Stalin had been so wise and unshakably just that he had never been put on the Communist index--something rare for a Western socialist.

No one could say, ever, that Notte had hedged or retreated or kept silent when a voice was needed. Well, said Irina, what of it? He had written, pledged, ~~warned, signed~~, declared. And what had he changed, diverted, or stopped? (FFD 229-230)

Notte's consciousness of causes is flawless, but, Gallant shows his response--his writing--has been entirely ineffectual. Furthermore, his self-righteous attentiveness to the victims of these political tides means that he victimizes his own family, and oppresses his wife:

"I tried to sell [my ring] when I needed money. . . . Everything [had been] thrown, given away. Not by me. My pearl necklace was sold for Spanish refugees. Victims, flotsam, the injured, the weak--they were important. I wasn't. The children weren't." (FFD 239)

Notte's writings have been as ineffectual as Herbert's letters in The Pegnitz Junction, though for different reasons. Gallant suggests here that writing by itself is not an answer to the world's ills, however moral or insightful the message. She suggests further that one must begin action against victimization and oppression by overturning oppressive structures in one's immediate environment, by liberating and caring for those individuals one deals with intimately--wife, children, servants.

Intellectual rightness about freedom, maintained inside an oppressive institution, is futile.

That "individual revolution" will be effective in influencing change only once oppressive structures are broken down is exemplified by Irina herself. Once her marriage is ended by Notte's death, Irina "seemed to come into her own" (FFD 229). She makes a new world for herself; and her succinct message cuts through the idyllic prose of her husband's will: "'In plain words . . . I am the heir'" (FFD 228). She takes an apartment and buys the pale furniture "that is usually sold to young couples" (FFD 229), and refuses to live within any specific definition--she is neither a "literary widow" nor a conventional widow. She has a former lover move in with her, to whom she gives his own room, and her letters take on an "April lightness" that troubles her children, for at her age, without their father, it must be a sham happiness (FFD 229).

She is not concerned with reconstructing the past, and in fact gradually loses interest in editing her husband's journals. She remains a vital force, and her world remains fluid, a world of new possibilities. She suggests that this world is not easy to live in--particularly for someone old enough to have "crystallized"--to be solid. Be she accepts the fluid world as it is, and seems pleasantly surprised by the fact that therein lies the mystery, the *élan vital*.

To [her favorite son] she now confided that she longed for her own childhood sometimes, in order to avoid having to judge herself. She was homesick for a time when nothing had crystallized and mistakes were allowed. Now, in old age, she had no excuse for errors. Every thought had a long meaning; every motive had angles and corners, and could be measured. And yet whatever she saw and thought and attempted was still fluid and vague. The shape of a table against afternoon light still held a mystery, awaited a final explanation. You looked for clarity, she wrote, and the answer you had was paleness, the flat white cast that a snowy sky throws across a room. (FFD 230)

Mystery, possibility, and freedom occur in the absence of oppressive structures--and Gallant suggests here again that "family" is an oppressive structure. One Christmas, Irina's family--her children--cannot visit her, and she refuses to visit them. They send her grandson, Riri, as a substitute. In this broken down structure, a relationship between the two flourishes. Their relationship begins as a "hard" one, with Riri more rigid than his grandmother: "'What is your best language, by the way?' she asks him. 'I am French,' he said with a sharp, sudden, hard hostility, the first tense bud of it, that made her murmur, 'So soon?'" (FFD 233)

The characters collide, as generations do, over some trivial matters--manners, routines at meals, chores. As the visit

continues, Gallant's juxtaposition of soft and solid images merge as do the two generations:

[T]hen (addressing Riri), [Irina] decided to wash all her amber necklaces. She fetched a wicker basket from her bedroom. It was lined with orange silk and filled with strings of beads. Riri followed her to the bathroom and sat on the end of the tub. She rolled up her soft sleeves and scrubbed the amber with laundry soap and a stiff brush. She scrubbed and rinsed and began all over again. . . .

After a time the amber began to shine. The smell made him homesick, but not unpleasantly. He carefully selected a necklace when she told him he might take one for his mother, and he rubbed it with a soft cloth. She showed him how to make the beads magnetic by rolling them in his palms.

"You can do that even with plastic," he said.

"Can you? How sad. It is dead matter."

"Amber is too," he said politely. (FFD 238)

Gallant shows symbolically that the two maintain different points of view on matter, but Riri's defensiveness is gone, and the tension between the two is dissolved. Gallant sardonically implies that the two even have a common view of succeeding generations: Riri complains about the younger boys at his school. "'A hopeless generation?' his grandmother inquires. He wasn't sure; he knew that his class had been better" (FFD 238).

Moments after Riri chooses a necklace for his mother, Irina invites him to pick his own gift from what he sees in her apartment. He selects an antique Russian box, what she most wants to keep. "'The cover fits,' he said" (FFD 242). The two characters come together pragmatically--through sharing concrete experience--not through intellectual or emotional identification, certainly not through philosophical agreement. It is Irina's ability to act spontaneously in terms of her grandson--to allow the world to be fluid--that prevents the two characters from hardening and that encourages openness and change. She does not try to build any moment into an enduring structure: Irina further refuses to play the traditional maternal role of savior, or authority.

She smiled, knowing how sorry he would be to go and how soon he would leave her behind. . . . He was asleep. His mouth opened slightly and the hair on his forehead became dark and damp. A doubled up arm looked uncomfortable but Irina did not interfere; his sunken mind, his unconscious movements, had to be independent, of her or anyone, particularly of her. She did not love him more or less than any of her grandchildren. You see? It all worked out, she was telling him. . . . Anything can be settled for a few days at a time, though not for longer. She put out the light, for which his body was grateful. His mind, at that moment, in a sunny icicle brightness, was not only skiing but flying. (FFD 243).

So Irina promotes freedom by acting according to a realistic perception of events and people immediately around her. Her revolution succeeds, and succeeds because unlike the Knights, who have only an abstract sense of Bernadette; unlike the Unwins, who refuse to perceive the people around them in the real world outside their own minds; unlike Herbert, who tries to offer his son a "settled" world, thereby dooming him to unending promises and apologies, Irina lives and interacts with the fluid, unsettled world. Though she is old and "angular," after Notte's death she lives spontaneously--capable of acting without the barriers and constraints that the family structure sets up. Thus she leaves her grandson's mind free to explore the world too--Riri and Irina open up possibilities for each other. Though she disapproves of some of his habits, she does not interfere with his experience. Instead, both characters remain in the whole world--and remain able to fly.

The theme of personal revolution in "Irina" is echoed in the Linnet Muir series which followed (1975-1977). These six stories, also autobiographical (Hatch 107), focus on an aspiring young writer in wartime Montreal and further demonstrate that even an astute consciousness is impotent unless it transcends the influence of the institutions that confine it. Young Linnet Muir is on a quest that requires honesty from individuals committed to maintaining social propriety--deception, to Gallant. And, in the absence of truth, Linnet has built cities of half memories in her own mind, institutionalizing half-truths. Only when these cities implode is she closer to real revolution.

In the Linnet Muir stories, an older Linnet narrates, taking an ironic view of herself as an idealistic eighteen year old. Linnet returns to Montreal at eighteen after a stint in New York schools. She had been sent there so her mother could avoid telling her about her father's death--only one example, Linnet feels, of adult hypocrisy. Young Linnet is well aware of how repressive and stuffy Canadian society is. In "In Youth is Pleasure" (November 1975), she returns determined to find out why and how her father died and to assert her independence from former authorities:

And so that June morning and the drive through empty, sunlit, wartime streets are even now like a roll of drums in the mind. My life was my own revolution--the tyrants deposed, the constitution wrenched from unwilling hands; I was, all by myself, the liberated crowd setting the palace on fire. . . . (HT 225)

Linnet is both a stronger and more insightful character than those who generally people Gallant's landscape. Even at eighteen, Linnet realizes that the provincialism which rules Quebec, where "'like' and 'don't like' were heavy emotional statements" (HT 229), leaves the landscape littered with "the dead of heart and spirit" (HT 228). But her intellectual perspicacity is not infallible. In "The Doctor" (June 1977), Linnet articulates with intelligence the isolation and mutual hostility of the two founding cultures of Quebec, French and Scottish. She emphasizes how rare was the coming together of the

two cultures in her childhood livingroom, where her parents and godparents, and her French Canadian doctor, "Uncle Raoul," conversed about revolutions, wars, and interesting European cities. Uncle Raoul, Linnet's childhood friend, recognized her precociousness and treated her as an equal whom she trusted. Linnet outlines for the reader the subtle tensions of the livingroom gatherings, the liaisons and conflicts that she recognizes by virtue of the immunity to hypocrisy "we are all born with and that vanishes just before puberty" (HT 304). But Gallant undermines this concept of the omniscient child when Linnet, at twenty, comes across Raoul's obituary in a Montreal paper. Two of his voices she recognizes--that of the doctor and the family man. But he had another voice that she never heard: he was a poet, an essayist, and a founding member of The Arts And Letters Society Of Quebec.

[The] third notice was an earthquake, the collapse of the cities we build over the past to cover seams and cracks we cannot account for. He must have been writing when my parents knew him. Why they neglected to speak of it is something too shameful to dwell on; he probably never mentioned it, knowing they would believe it impossible. French books were from France; English books from England or the United States. It would not have entered their minds that the languages they heard spoken around them could be written, too. (HT 313)

Though Linnet as a child was able to comprehend cultural barriers in Quebec, she is shocked to realize at eighteen that she too has been walled out.

Linnet uses the image of "cities built within the mind" to explain and cover the gaps, the questions, the contradictions of the past (HT 313). Just as Raoul's obituary destroys part of her own inner landscape, so her attempt to wrench the truth about her father's death from his friends results in a further inner landslide.

The "truth" about her father has several versions, but they share in common two significant elements: a degenerative disease of the spine and a gun he uses to shoot himself (HT 234). Linnet explains in "In Youth is Pleasure" how the repressive Quebec society restructures real events: because suicide is a mortal sin for Catholics, it is never reported in the newspapers. Because it would not be fair to suggest that only Protestants go over the edge and commit suicide, as far as Canadian newspapers are concerned, "the possibility was eliminated and people came to a natural end in a running car in a closed garage, hanging from a rafter in the barn, in an icy lake with a canoe left to drift empty" (HT 235).

Linnet wants to learn what contributed to her father's despair, but his friends feign ignorance--or more pathetically, really are unaware--of Duncan Muir's emotional state. Rather than constantly reinvent the circumstances of her father's death,

as one of her acquaintances does, Linnet decides on one story: "Before July was out I had settled his fate in my mind and I never varied: I thought he had died of homesickness; sickness for England was the consumption, the gun, the everything" (HT 235).

Certainly the older Linnet, narrating this story, points out the irony of a personal revolution against hypocrisy in June ending in this oversimplified version of her father's death in July. But Linnet will never be able to learn the truth from middle-aged men capable of "savage" indifference--men who cross the street in order to avoid acknowledging their friend's pain. (HT 229). "[If] I was to live my own life I had to let go. I wrote in my journal that 'they' had got him but would not get me . . ." (HT 235).

Linnet "closes the drawer" on her father's story, and Ronald Hatch suggests that this is a kind of suicide for her, the death of Linnet's declaration of freedom. Linnet is left, he states, hollow, "outside the world as history"; "living out a version of life from which there is no escape" (110). True, after her decision about her father's death, Linnet kills a part of the past as it existed in her mind:

Montreal, in memory, was a leafy citadel where I knew every tree. In reality I recognized nearly nothing and had to start from scratch. Sherbrooke Street had been the dream street, pure white. . . . One day, standing at a corner, waiting for the light to change, I

understood that the Sherbrooke Street of my exile--my Mecca, my Jerusalem--was this. It had to be: there could not be two. It was only this. (HT 235)

Linnet renounces the romantic vision she held of Montreal in her mind in the years she has been absent. But she does not, contrary to what Hatch suggests, renounce all authentic experience of the past:

Reality, as always, was narrow and dull. And yet what dramatic things had taken place on this very corner: Once Satan had approached me--furry dark skin, claws, red eyes, the lot. He urged me to cross the street. . . . I explained, "The Devil told me to." I had no idea until then that my parents did not believe what I was taught in my convent school. (Satan is not bilingual, by the way; he speaks Quebec French.) (HT 236)

The tone of the parenthetical statement may be partly tongue-in-cheek. But Linnet's use of language--and the fact that ~~the~~ older Linnet still believes in demons (HT 232)--proves that some of the essence of the past still lives on in her realistic view of present-day Sherbrooke Street. Furthermore, at the end of the story, the older narrator herself points out the limited capacity for insight and feeling she held at eighteen. In the last scene, young Linnet passes the school she attended--not a penitentiary, after all, but a large house, she realizes.

A crocodile of little girls emerged from the front gate and proceeded along the street--white-faced, black-clad, eyes cast down. I knew they were bored, fidgety, anxious and probably hungry. I should have felt pity, but at eighteen, all that came to me was thankfulness that I had been correct about one thing throughout my youth, which I now considered ended: time had been on my side, faithfully, and unless you died you were always bound to escape. (HT 237)

Ronald Hatch emphasizes the irony of the pun in "bound" ~~to~~ escape (110), but he does not address the older narrator's voice here, which claims that Linnet does indeed transcend the past with her capacity for insight and feelings intact--the older Linnet *knows* what she *should* have felt, but, at eighteen, could not.

Other stories in the Linnet Muir series further demonstrate that individual revolution attempted inside the bounds of conventional structures is ineffectual. In "With a Capital T" (1978), the older narrator looks ironically at Linnet's idealistic expectations of life after the war: "I took it for granted that our victory over Fascism would be followed by a sunburst of revolution. . . . 'Whatever happens,' I wrote, 'it will be the Truth, nothing half-hearted, the Truth with a capital T'" (HT 318).

But the ground for the social revolution that Linnet envisions is barren. She writes captions for a newspaper which publishes the truths that conform to its "ground rules":

A few of these rules have been established for the convenience of the wives of senior persons and reflect their tastes and interests, their inhibitions and fears, their desire to see close friends' pictures when they open to the social page, their fragile attention span.
(HT 320)

Her newspaper job brings Linnet into an encounter with her godmother, a woman whom Linnet's father loved seriously enough to consider leaving his wife. Linnet's ideal of truth dies in the "reunion" which leaves both characters isolated from one another:

How do you deal with life? her particular Canadian catechism asked. By ignoring its claims on feeling.

(HT 327)

The careless debts [my parents] had left strewn behind and that I kept picking up and trying to settle were not owed in currency.

Why didn't I come straight out with that? Because you can't--not in that world. No one can have the last retort, not even when there is truth to it. Hints and reminders flutter to the ground in overheated winter rooms, lie stunned for a season, are reborn as everlasting grudges. (HT 329)

The "truth" that lives in Linnet's mind dies in the stifling world of Canadian Anglo propriety. A grown up Linnet reminds us that her young self's insistence on a world where no half measures were allowed, but only truth with a capital T, itself created a barrier between the two women that might have opened both to some realizations about the past.

In "Between Zero and One" (December 1975), young Linnet describes in scathing detail the institutions typical of Anglo Canadian society. She reports with impatience the universal attitude of the men she works with: change is always for the worse.

Easily angry, easily offended, underpaid, at the mercy of accidents . . . still they'd have resisted change for the better. Change was double-edged; it might mean improving people with funny names, letting them get uppity. What they had instead were marks of privilege--a blind sureness that they were superior in every way to French Canadians, whom in some strange fashion they neither heard nor saw (a lack of interest that was doubly and triply returned). . . . (HT 247)

The story ironically contrasts Linnet's ability to perceive accurately the people trapped around her with her inability to believe she too will be entrapped. When Linnet decides to marry, to leap "between zero and one," her office mates urge her not to--though not one of them, she observes, ever complains about

his wife. We infer that, as they do in their jobs, the men passively submit to the decaying institution of marriage. It is for them as oppressive an institution as their jobs, as oppressive as the Fascist forces the men vicariously struggle against by reading about the battles, by talking about the vets.

Though insightful about others' unhappiness with marriage, young Linnet denies that there could be any connection between her life at "one" and the others' lives. Nonetheless, the question she poses, "And what will happen at One? Yes, what will happen?" frightens and disturbs her (HT 260).

In "Varieties of Exile" (January 1976), the older narrator is more explicit about her blind spot. Young Linnet's idealism abhors all the forms of oppression and entrapment in the world around her, but because her vision is utopic, romantic and abstract--built within her own mind--it is isolated and uninformed by reality:

I was entirely at home with foreigners, which is not surprising--the home was all in my head. They were the only people I had met until now who believed, as I did, that our victory would prove to be a tidal wave nothing could stop. What I did not know was how many of them hoped and expected their neighbors to be washed away, too. (HT 261-262)

Living in this untested literary world, Gallant points out, is dangerous and costly in terms of human morality. In "An Alien Flower," Helga deliberately lives in isolation from reality, choosing to let "the bodies pile up outside" (PJ 187). An older, wiser Linnet Muir looks back at her adolescence and reveals that though her motives may have been more admirable than Helga's, the implications of living isolated from reality are the same:

I was only beginning to hear the first rumblings of hypocrisy on our side--the right side; the wrong side seemed to be guilty of every sin humanly possible except simulation of virtue. I put the blame for the racial barrier on Churchill, who certainly knew, and had known . . . ; I believed that Roosevelt, Stalin, Chiang Kai-shek, and de Gaulle did not know, and that should it ever come to their attention they would be as shocked as I was. (HT 280)

"Varieties of Exile" is the story of a remittance man who lives within the stifling Anglo-Canadian boundaries but who espouses the social revolution Linnet longs for. Linnet is fascinated by the contradictions he incorporates, not having learned by then, she writes, to be careful around such ambiguous situations. Caught up by the puzzle of Frank, she writes short stories about him, putting them next to her collection of Czech and German anti-Fascist stories (HT 281). She also writes a novel based on his former mentor, a Scotsman, an idealistic revolutionary whom Frank is always quoting. By the time Frank

joins the Canadian army (because it pays more money than the British), Linnet has become fully aware of his hypocrisies, but not yet aware of her own. A few years later, news of his death shocks her momentarily, but by then her inner world has atrophied and died. She destroys all the "anti-Fascist" stories written about him, which "sounded as if they were translated from the Russian by Constance Garnett" (HT 281). She destroys the novel too--though it had "shape, density, voice. . . ."

I minded about that one manuscript for a time. All this business of putting life through a sieve and then discarding it was another variety of exile; I knew that even then, but it seemed quite right and perfectly natural. (HT 281)

At eighteen, Linnet acknowledges, she wrote fiction to untangle knots. Of course, in the setting of Canada--where she repeatedly tells us that the Anglos evade feeling and expressions about feeling--it felt right and natural through her fiction to put life through a sieve and discard it (HT 281). Only later, we infer, from outside Canada, does she realize that her stories served to isolate experience from feeling and blind her to what is authentic experience. We understand why she does not regret destroying the stories about Frank. In them, she recognizes that her own voice is false, and that they are written about a character whose representation of revolution is a sham. We understand, too, why she does regret destroying her novel about the "authentic" voice of revolution--the Scot from Aberdeen.

Young Linnet's concept of revolution is abstract: it does not allow for refugees to change their names, get jobs, eat cornflakes (HT 281). Within her mind she had envisioned a tidal wave that would leave the world bare, a fresh page on which will be written justice, equality, generosity (HT 261-262). But because the vision is neither centred in nor informed by reality, it atrophies and dies. Linnet sweeps the debris away by burning her fiction. A twinge of regret should warn her that she has discarded something real, too--the novel whose voice speaks of real potential revolution and freedom--a story created jointly by the outside world (the Scotsman) and by Linnet's imagination. But, the older and more insightful narrator tells us, she minded only for a while, for she had moved on into a "new Montreal":

My evolution was like freaky weather then: a few months, a few weeks even, were the equivalent of long second thoughts later on. I was in a completely other climate. I no longer missed New York and "different things." I had become patriotic. (HT 276)

Linnet's revolution at eighteen falls short of her expectations and the older Linnet does not shrink from satirizing her own idealism, her sense of superiority, her naiveté. But there is evidence that ultimately Linnet does gain insight about her own nature, and is able to overcome the Canadian cultural heritage of repression of feeling. Simply because she is still writing, we know Linnet has not been stifled. Furthermore, the evolution she refers to, however sporadic, has brought her to the

point where she can look back at the inner world her younger self created, and perceive realistically what she could not see at eighteen or twenty:

I did not forget [my godmother], but I forgot about her. Her life seemed silent and slow and choked with wrack, while mine moved all in a rush, dislodging every obstacle it encountered. Then mine slowed, too; stopped flooding its banks. The noise of it abated and I could hear the past. ("With a Capital T," HT 329)

Linnet now implies that she understands the purpose of fiction to be more than untangling intellectual knots, and that using fiction to establish emotional detachment from a subject no longer "seems natural" or "right." Ultimately, then, Linnet implies that she does succeed in her revolution against repression, despite stumbling over the obstacles of arrogance in her youth. Furthermore, Linnet has eventually found a variety of exile--expatriation--that does not distance her from truths, even uncomfortable ones. Only by abandoning the hierarchical system of repressive institutions--including her ideals about utopic institutions--does the individual really achieve independence and freedom. In this sense, Linnet identifies herself with her mother who had a similar call to leave the stultifying society she scandalized:

From our separate rooms my mother and I heard the unrivalled summons, the long, urgent uniquely North

American beckoning. She would follow and so would I, but separately, years and desires and destinations apart. I think that women once pledged in such a manner are more steadfast than men. ("Voices Lost in Snow," HT 289)

Ronald Hatch states that because Linnet neglects to search for her mother, her character does not develop (109). But though Linnet's attitude toward her charming but negligent mother is ambivalent, the figure of the "shady lady," the woman who renounces conventional institutions, is here as in other Gallant works largely a positive, vital force. As Linnet notes about poor Frank, the remittance man, the male line in most patriarchal British families was a ghost story. "None of us is ever saved entirely," Linnet muses, "but even an erratic and alarming maternal vitality could turn out to be better than none" ("Varieties of Exile," HT 271).

These same principles inform the Magdalena series, four short stories published in 1983 and collected in Overhead in a Balloon. The plight of the three characters indicates that freedom is not to be found by functioning within the conventional structures. Magdalena, Edouard, and Juliette cooperate in a complex interplay that, given their submissiveness to authorities--propriety, the law, or the church--dooms each of them to personal failure. The potential bearer of vitality in the story, Magdalena, is thwarted by her own conversion to the Catholic Church, and her love for Edouard.

Similarly structured to the Linnet Muir series, these stories follow Edouard's recollections of his youth in wartime. His choices then determine the next forty years of his life. When we are introduced to him in the first story of the series, "A Recollection" (August 1983), Edouard is an elderly intellectual, a respected broadcast personality in Paris, a veteran complete with war wounds. He is soon revealed as one of Gallant's finest satirical caricatures.

Edouard's middle-class parents--both public school teachers--spent money carefully so their son could "sit reading books into early manhood" (OB 152). As a result, Edouard acts as though he is a character existing outside the limits and conventions to which others are subject. His address on the rue des Solitaires suggests this, as does his perception that the poems he reads "spoke only to me" (OB 160). Like Richard Notte, Edouard believes his actions to be outside the realm of practical consequences, and at twenty-two he marries Magdalena, a "devout, light-hearted, probably wayward Catholic convert . . . Jewish and foreign. . . ." (OB 151). His relationship with her is only cryptically explained in this story: she is thirty-six, fascinating, and daily entertains many men well-known in Paris. Edouard, treated by Lena's friends like a puppy, marries her when "[A]nti-Jewish thoughts and feelings had suddenly hardened into laws, and she had to be protected" (OB 151). But his role as rescuer is ironic on many levels. First, Magdalena insists their marriage be blessed by the Church. Edouard betrays his rabidly anti-clerical parents by agreeing to this, only to admit that at

the wedding "I was the outsider, the pagan, unbaptized, unsaved" (OB 153). So complete is his intellectual divorce from reality that Edouard promises his children to Rome. Shortly after the wedding, he hides a yellow star of David that Magdalena has pocketed away and reflects:

When my adventures were over, I would show it to my children; I did not for a second see Magdalena as their mother. They were real children, not souls to be bargained. So it seems to me now. It shows how far into the future I thought you could safely carry a piece of the past. (OB 160)

Even then he is aware that his motives are not entirely unselfish:

I had married her to do the right thing; that was established. Other men have behaved well in the past, and will continue to do so. It comforted me to know I was not the only one with a safe conscience. Thinking this in the darkened, swaying compartment meant that I was lucid and generous, and also something of a louse. (OB 158)

Furthermore, Gallant draws disturbing parallels between Edouard, liberator, and Edouard, oppressor. Magdalena calls him a "youth leader." Edouard, briefly considering Lena as his wife, does so only in the context of authority--he has a right to know where

she is staying: "After all, she is my wife" (OB 158). When Lena's luggage is searched by German soldiers, Edouard realizes she has never owned anything (other than the yellow star) so coarse to the touch.

"Cosmopolitan," an incendiary word now, flared in my mind. In the quiet train (no train is so still as one under search), its light seemed to seek out crude editorials, offensive cartoons, repulsive graffiti. (OB 156)

For a moment, he shares her vision, but fear of the occupation forces overshadows any cosmopolitan point of view:

The peasants in uniform . . . asked no more than any frontier inspector, but the reply came under the heading of life and death. "Cosmopolitan" had flared like a star; it dissolved into a dirty little puddle. Its new, political meaning seeped into my brain and ran past my beliefs and convictions, and everything my parents stood for. I felt it inside my skull, and I wondered if it would ever evaporate. (OB 156-157)

Practical fear overcomes the idealistic principles instilled in him by his parents and his poetry books, and Edouard takes on the prejudices and suspicions sown by the Nazis.

Magdalena would sit the war out in an airy villa--the kind aliens can afford. (OB 158)

I wondered what she meant by "friends in Cannes." To women of her sort, "friend" is often used as a vague substitute for "lover." (Notice how soon after thinking "cosmopolitan" I thought "of her sort.") She had mentioned the name of the people who were offering her shelter in Cannes; it was a French name but perhaps an alias. (OB 157-158)

These passages clearly indicate that Edouard is ironically like the very occupation forces he is leaving France to fight. The last lines of the story are even more damning evidence of his "collaboration": "Long after the war, I found the star . . . and I offered to give it back to Magdalena, but she said she knew what it was like" (OB 160). Having thus "saved" Magdalena, he leaves the train at Marseilles on a quest to join the Free French fighters in London: "I saw myself floating over the map of France, harnessed to a dazzling parachute, with a gun under my arm" (OB 160).

His course in London, described in "The Colonel's Child" (October 1983) is predictable: the schism between Edouard's mental concept of political action and what constitutes political reality proves disastrous for him. "I lay in a hospital ward with a broken nose, broken left arm, and fractures in both legs. They had been trying to teach me to ride a motorbike, and on my first time out I skidded into a wall" (OB 167). His instructor's

advice reminds the reader that the wall Edouard crashes into is an intellectual construction--he labels Edouard a "cerebral type" and gives him an office job where "there is no equipment to smash--not even a typewriter" (OB 167). These words seem doubly ironic--for indeed, even Edouard's writings are incapable of smashing any oppressive force. By the end of his career, he is most renowned for a "five-hour television series, 'Stendahl and the Italian experience,' which was to win an award in Japan" ("Rue de Lille," OB 163).

If he suspects his attempt to bring freedom to France has failed, he comforts himself that he reached London, the peak of his hopes and desires. But just as the Montreal constructed in Linnet's mind proves an inappropriate setting for revolution, so London proves an inhospitable environment for ambition. Edouard is foiled again: his crash this time involves his literary aspirations and a passionless relationship with Juliette, who will later become his second wife.

In the hospital, forced out of the storybook roles he has fit himself into, Edouard channels his ambition into a new direction: "I think I am a poet. . . . I can't be sure" (OB 167). If not an epic hero, then surely the creator: but Edouard has already assured us, and Magdalena, that he "never invented anything" (OB 152). He remains in London, in a reduced world of French refugees where everyone becomes a symbol of social rank, and notes that he finally starts to "get the hang of French society" (OB 170). He stops writing poetry and begins a "merciless" novel

about the French in London: "'they're all dead, but they don't know it. Every character is in a ~~special~~ Hell, made to measure'" (OB 171). But he tears up his novel shortly after he becomes engaged to Juliette. When she asks why, he thinks to himself, "Because I can't wrench life around to make it fit some fantasy. I don't know how to make life sound worse or better, or how to make it sound true" (OB 174). In other words, just as Linnet tries to impose patterns on an unwieldy reality, so Edouard wants to shape reality to conform to his intellectual concept of what it should be. When it does not--unlike Linnet, who keeps writing--Edouard tears up his novel, his criticism of the London French, and accepts an offer by Juliette's mother to get him into broadcasting. He does not recall that her job in London (the "peak" of his hopes and desires) is teaching French émigrés to read signs like "Stop" and "No Entry" (OB 168).

Edouard represents a purely cerebral way of experiencing things. That Gallant sees this passionless analysis of experience as sterile is most dramatically shown in his relationship with Juliette. In "The Colonel's Child," Gallant belabors the point that Juliette is indeed a child, and one whose development will not encroach upon the proprieties of the French Protestant upper class. Though she has left school, she wears her uniforms rather than buy clothes herself because "It's not done" (OB 168). Having kept her dolls until she was fifteen, at eighteen she plans children with Edouard--at least five--and names them: a Thomas, and a Claire (OB 172). Nor does she take in the full implications of Edouard's reaction.

"I hate children," I said. I was amazed that I could say something so definite and so cruel, and that sounded so true. When had I stopped liking them? Perhaps when I adopted the colonel's child, believing she would never grow up. I could have said, "I don't like other children," but nothing about this conversation was thought out. (OB 172)

Edouard and Juliette first make love and become engaged on hearing that her father (who is with the Resistance) has been arrested in France. Their passion, such as it is, stems from her grief and his protection. Soon after, Juliette learns from connections in Paris that Edouard is married. When he insists that he did get married but has no wife, she incorporates and reflects back his contradiction and unknowingly prophesizes what their life as intellectuals in the French upper-middle class will be: she decides to stay the night at Edouard's--a "radical" move, Edouard decides: "'Oh, what a pity,' she said. 'We'll always be together. We will always be happy. How lovely! What a shame!'" (OB 174).

Edouard and Juliette's relationship in Paris after the war is the focus of "Rue de Lille" (September 1983), the second story in the series, although chronologically it follows "The Colonel's Child." In the first sentence of the story, Edouard announces Juliette's death--in the apartment she vowed not to die in. Nearly sixty, she died reaching for a coin under a chest of drawers--looking more girlish than at any time since he'd first

met her. They have remained for years in this dark apartment, he explains, because "'We know the worst of what we've got,' we told each other. 'It's better than a bad surprise'" (OB 161). The vignettes of their life together that Edouard presents reinforce the sterility of their relationship--they are surrounded by walls of washed-out blue, colors that carry no threats and no promises. Against this background, Juliette's family speaks with "the soft clicking of upper-class Protestant consonants" that made conversation "distant and neutral" (OB 163).

They have been unable to escape bad surprises--Juliette is childless. Magdalena, considering herself Edouard's true, and only wife by virtue of the Church, for years refused Edouard a divorce. Only when French law changed did Edouard marry Juliette, then no longer able to conceive. Now what brings Edouard and Juliette closest is "the comforting glow of each other's working life, a lamp behind a window" (OB 163). But this unity across a distance is vulnerable, for in winter, in their dark apartment, the lights must be kept on all day. We realize the irony of her death when Juliette, who pays for them, remarks that the electricity bills are staggering (OB 162). In addition, France is in an energy crisis (OB 165). Intellectual distance characterizes Edouard's and Juliette's relationship. When Juliette bewails all the trouble Magdalena's Catholicism has caused--the fantasies that her marriage is registered in Heaven--Edouard explains: "'Those are things people put in letters. . . . They sit down alone and pour it out. It's sincere at that moment'" (OB 164). Juliette leaves the room, the

vision of Magdalena and Edouard "postured in the distance, like characters in fiction," having "bombed flat" the walls of her home (OB 165). Edouard watches a doctor on television discuss how the daylight savings schedule makes it difficult for parents to be nice to their children, then watches himself perform on the next program, before he finally goes to comfort Juliette. She sits beside him, knitting squares for a blanket: "there was always, somewhere, a flood or an earthquake or a flow of refugees, and those who outlasted jeopardy had to be covered" (OB 165). Unable to warm one another, Juliette and Edouard attempt to fulfill an abstract "need," without having to admit their own.

In "Lena" (October 1983), the fourth and final story of the Magdalena series, Edouard is sixty-five, petulant, and a hypocrite. "'But what were you *doing* during those years?' [he challenges Magdalena]. (My mother chalked Gaullist slogans on walls in Paris. The father of my second wife died deported. I joined the Free French in London)" (OB 178). He complains about the young who are derisive and ribald about wounded veterans of the war, and refers to the "accident" he suffered in wartime as though it were a combat wound. And though he complains that Magdalena summons him, and that she assumes she is his wife and widow-to-be, as though Juliette never existed, he betrays himself. For when he envisions her room, it is white, with red patches--her lips, her nails, and the Legion Of Honor on some admirer's lapel (OB 179). He is the admirer. Although he complains bitterly about her Catholic metaphysical rules about virtue, and calls her values a "moral rock pile, ready to slide"

(OB 180), it is Magdalena who understands, better than Juliette, Edouard's feelings about the war.

[Juliette] mentioned the Holy Spirit as an old acquaintance of her own class and background, a cultivated European with an open mind. . . .

I said that the Holy Spirit might find something more useful to attend to than a ruptured eardrum. We were barely ten years out of a disastrous war. All over the world, there were people sick, afraid, despairing. Only a few days before, the President of Brazil had shot himself to death.

Juliette replied that there were needs beyond our understanding. "God knows what he wants," she said. I am sure she believed it.

"God wanted Auschwitz?" I said.

I felt a touch on my arm, and I looked down and saw a middle-aged hand and a wedding ring. . . .

Magdalena and I sat quietly, she with her hand still on my arm, as if she had finally completed a gesture begun a long time before. (OB 182-183)

In fact, Magdalena completes the gesture she made when Edouard left her to join the Free French in London. The gesture is maternal, loving, and one Edouard will ultimately deny. Some time after he is widowed, and there is nothing but silence from Juliette, who is "not anywhere" (OB 184), he goes to visit Magdalena. He carries a bottle of Krug, iced, and glasses. When

her bed is empty, he thinks she is dead, and feels "shock, guilt, remorse, and relief" (OB 185). But she is not dead, and they sip the wine together. She notices then the Legion of Honor on his lapel, and he remarks that he'd been awarded it in a ceremony that morning for "cultural enrichment of the media" (OB 186). When Magdalena comments that his presence and the wine are a good birthday surprise, Edouard "felt as if warm ashes were banked round [his] heart, like a residue of good intentions" (OB 186). Recalling how he notified her that he was in love with Juliette, and how hurt she must have been, he opens to her briefly.

"If it means anything at all to you," I said, the coals glowing brighter, "if it can help you to understand me, in any way--well, no one ever fascinated me as much as you." This after only one glass.

"But, perhaps, you never loved me," she said.

"Probably not," I said. "Although I must have."

"You mean, in a way?" she said.

"I suppose so."

The room became so quiet that I could hear the afternoon movie on television in the next room. I recognized the voice of the actor who dubs Robert Redford. (OB 186)

The image is one of distance and removal--Edouard's reference to how he loves is parodied by silence so acute that, from another room can be heard an actor on television, dubbing the voice of another actor famous for love scenes.

Magdalena calls his vague answers "a death sentence," and, shouting, he then accuses her of depriving Juliette of children, since she would not have them out of wedlock. Women like Juliette would not do "that sort of thing," he explains, reminding Magdalena about the problems he would have had claiming Juliette's children anyway (OB 187). His discussion is purely hypothetical and reminiscent of the imaginary souls he bargained to Rome when he married Magdalena. Nor has his judgmental attitude about "that sort of thing" changed since fear muddled his mind over thirty years earlier.

It is impossible to avoid the significance of Magdalena's name here--and certainly Gallant suggests it is important simply by remarking that after this confrontation, Edouard called his "poor, mad, true, and only wife," 'Lena' (OB 187). There are circumstantial parallels to Mary Magdalena--the lady of ill repute protected by a savior, redeemed and made "honest." But in these stories, the savior is incapable of forgiveness and refuses to experience passion other than from a cerebral height. The institutions--the law, the church, the hospital . . . all the social structures--deny people the rituals and the sacraments that would perhaps have some redemptive power. And, in this setting, naïve children remain children, ladies of ill repute remain tainted, and saviors become pompous authorities awarded with medals for cultural enrichment of the media rather than glory for acting for freedom in a dangerous world. Edouard fails because his intentions--intellectually correct--are divorced from real events and honest emotions--passion, forgiveness. Juliette,

too, only translates post-War American fiction--and is fundamentally untouched by the spiritual essence of American rebelliousness. Both characters, Gallant states, think they can just "hold their breath and jump" ("The Colonel's Child," OB 167, 175). Both characters end up settling for the dry, safe life upper-class Paris can offer. Since Edouard cannot be the savior he pictures himself as, he becomes Juliette's "savior" within the constricted society of the French upper class.

In a sense, the Magdalena stories invert the typical Christian allegory. Here, as in much of her fiction, Gallant puts forth an ambiguous figure--sometimes an effeminate man, sometimes a child, more often a woman, as potential "savior." Because she is a chaotic force, because she works against traditional structures and traditional values, this figure has the capacity to touch for herself or to put people in touch with "authentic experience"--experience outside the petty hierarchies of family, job, society; outside the structures that the mind (and particularly the astute mind) creates in lieu of living in the surrounding institutions. It is important to emphasize that this feminine force (the "shady lady") is ambiguous; these characters, like Felix in "The Other Paris," like Sylvie in "The Cost of Living," like Linnet's mother in the Linnet Muir series, do not in themselves constitute a passage to something more real than the artificial structures built by societies intent upon comfort and the *status quo*. But Gallant implies that these characters who renounce social constrictions at least have a chance to transcend them: Isobel in Its Image on the Mirror, for

example; as well as Linnet Muir and Irina. Furthermore, characters who allow themselves to engage with what Linnet called an "alarming maternal vitality" have the potential to develop beyond their society's or their own mind's limits. Were any of these characters willing to integrate the conflict produced by setting their ideals asea in a fluid reality--if they were willing to live in an "unsettled" realm--they would have potential to grow. But they are not willing; they settle for the security, the structure institutions around them, or the institutions they build in their minds to cover the gap between the ideal and reality. Edouard cannot reconcile ideal love--or pure sacrifice--and "that sort of thing." So he ends up with childish, innocent Juliette, but is bound--and binds both his wives--to barrenness. So, too, do his exact literary analyses remain sterile and irrelevant.

There seem to be two recurring rites of passage essential to growth in Gallant's fiction. One is engaging wholeheartedly with agents of real (unstructured) experience; another is "exile" that risks the *status quo*--moving away from the structures that "secure" one. Edouard refuses to do either. He rejects fluid experience, opting for the clicking syllables of the French upper class. Unlike Linnet, who discards her false stories and later writes true ones when she can hear the experiences she lived, Edouard denies Magdalena's love to the end. "I glance away then, anywhere--at the clock, out the window. I have put up with everything, but I intend to refuse her last imposition, the encounter with her blue, enduring look of pure love" (OB 187).

Edouard, lisping through his new false teeth on radio shows that ask what saint Sartre might have wanted to meet had he the chance, is a literary game-player; as a "savior" of other lives he is a parody; as a creator of his own life--or even of living fiction--he, like Juliette, is unable to conceive.

CONCLUSION

Gallant indicates that individuals are prevented from acting spontaneously by rules, ideals, or models that they have absorbed from the social and cultural structures in which they have been raised. These structures abhor change, and so abhor reality: thus, individuals who accept institutionalized ideas and visions of what "real" should be have distorted perceptions. These distorted perceptions lead to spiritual death for individuals, for relationships, and, on the global level, for entire nations and societies. In her later stories, Gallant emphasizes that astute perceptions alone, however, are no guarantee of "authentic" experience. She suggests that the intellect, too, favors structures, models, and objective realities--and that these structures are no less deluding or deadening than social institutions.

Freedom, from Gallant's perspective, consists of the capacity to remember events and their implications, without externally imposed distortions, and to imagine choices or actions beyond the limitations of institutionalized tenets. Individual revolution, then, is most apt to thrive when institutions break down, before they are replaced by new structures, new orders. These orders exist both externally, as political or social organizations, and internally, as intellectual preconceptions. That the world is unsettled Gallant makes clear and she emphasizes that freedom

exists only when the world is indeed perceived as that. She further suggests that the institutions that attempt to settle the world for more than "a few days at a time" are dishonest and destructive.

This thesis begins the exploration of the puzzles Gallant puts forth. A study of how Gallant uses memory as a suppressive device; a study of the different levels of irony and humor; and, especially, a study of the feminine principle in Gallant would further add to our appreciation of her fiction.

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