

Braided Strands of Meaning:  
Mavis Gallant's Language

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## CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

This thesis grew out of the difficulties in classifying Gallant's fiction. Critics, when examining the works of Mavis Gallant, have tended to use a thematic approach: the themes of exile, fractured human relationships, and the importance of memory in recreating the past have all been described as unifying features of her work.<sup>1</sup> The critics' reliance upon this particular approach has meant that the way in which Gallant uses language to construct her fiction has been relatively neglected. As Barbara Godard writes: "Obsessed with thematic analysis and the national scene, critics failed to evolve a vocabulary and concepts for discussing the construction of literary reality, for exploring the technical means of achieving what Barthes calls the 'reality effect'" (76). Godard's study, which develops a semiotics of irony through an analysis of Gallant's irony, takes the first step in addressing this critical deficiency. In this thesis, I would like to continue along the path Godard has illuminated. Through an exploration of the structure of two of Gallant's texts,<sup>2</sup> this thesis will examine the way in which Gallant uses language itself to undercut the 'reality effect' created by language.

Gallant constructs her fictional worlds through language; to say this seems to be stating the obvious, and yet, this is a point which often escapes critical attention. As Belsey writes: ". . . it is language which offers the possibility of constructing a world of individuals and things, and of differentiating between them" (4). Unfortunately, it is all too easy to move from the text, from language, to the 'reality'

which the language of the text both reflects and creates. This jump from language to 'reality' results in a lack of critical attention to language itself.

Gallant's language draws us as readers into making the jump from language to 'reality'. Gallant's texts encourage the reader to accept the words of the text as a 'reality'; yet, at the same time, her texts contain many instances in which this created 'reality' is called into question. Winfried Siemerling states that Gallant's language has "the problematic nature of signs somewhere between transparency and opaqueness" (144); this metaphor can be extended to Gallant's texts, in which meaning hovers between "transparency and opaqueness." The resulting contradictions cause problems for the critic in both the classification and analysis of Gallant's work.

Many critics have placed Gallant's work in the genre of realism.<sup>3</sup> Gallant's work contains many elements found in what Catherine Belsey calls the mode of classic realism. Belsey categorizes the three characteristics of classic realism as: "illusionism, narrative which leads to closure, and a hierarchy of discourses which establishes the 'truth' of the story" (70).<sup>4</sup> Illusionism is the creation of a 'reality' through words and, as has been already mentioned, Gallant is particularly skillful at this task. It is the two other characteristics which move her work beyond the boundaries of classic realism.

Closure is the movement of a text towards a discernible meaning and an established order. When closure occurs, there is an ending that has a sense of conclusion, completeness, and finality. For example, in a murder mystery closure occurs when

the name of the murderer is revealed. At this point, the meaning of the text is fixed (the reader cannot dispute that the murderer is who the author says he/she is) and the established order (which was disturbed by the actions of the murderer) can be resumed. To continue with this analogy, in many of Gallant's texts the name of the murderer is never revealed or, if it is, the name is revealed in such a way that the reader is uncertain whether he/she can believe the name given is the correct one. In the two texts examined in this thesis, closure does not occur and the 'truth' of the text remains unfixed.

Gallant's texts escape from the restraints of fixed meaning and the tendency towards closure and invite the reader (and/or critic) to participate in constructing a "plurality of meaning" (Barthes, "From Work to Text" 715). As Lawrence Matthews writes in his article "Ghosts and Saints":

She [Gallant] does not make it easy for the reader to determine, in the case of any given story, what this truth is. Meaning in her work flows from a sophisticated use of tone, and from an appeal to values that may be undefined in the story, but that the reader is expected to share [my emphasis]. Sometimes the most remarkable events or judgements are presented without elaboration or evaluative comment by the narrative voice. (157)

The lack of elaboration or evaluation by the narrative voice means that the reader has more freedom to construct his/her own version of the 'truth' of the text. The narrative voice is not



given precedence over the other voices in the text. In a classic realist text, as Belsey explains, one voice or discourse is privileged above others; there is a hierarchy of discourses and the reader can refer to the highest discourse for the 'truth' of the text. "The hierarchy works above all by means of a privileged discourse which places as subordinate all the discourses that are literally or figuratively between inverted commas" (Belsey 70). In Gallant's text, despite Matthews' comment about the values "that the reader is expected to share," there is no privileged discourse. A multiplicity of discourses combines to form the meaning of the text; one discourse is not privileged over another.

Coral Ann Howells, in her book Private and Fictional Worlds, claims that Gallant's narrative detachment puts her in the modernist camp, along with James Joyce and Virginia Woolf:

like Joyce's stories Gallant's offer no privileged point of view from which to judge what we have been reading. There are no authoritative interpreters, least of all the narrators of the stories. (91-92)

Howells writes that "modernism is an important feature in Gallant's fictions of displacement" (92). Robertson Davies, in his article "The Novels of Mavis Gallant," agrees with this classification and places Gallant's work "in the modern mode" (69). Other critics also place Gallant in the modern camp.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, Gallant's themes of exile and displacement, loss and alienation, show her affiliation with the modern mode.<sup>6</sup> However,

her work also contains many of the

confusions, distortions and disruptions . . .

[which] reflect a view of the world as not merely subjectively constructed (as modernist fiction implied) but as abstract, meaningless, radically resistant to totalizing interpretation. (Lodge 26)

The above quotation is part of David Lodge's definition of the postmodern text and in many ways this quotation applies to Mavis Gallant's fiction. Barbara Godard says that "The Pegnitz Junction, with its complex embeddings and intertextuality . . . fits the postmodernist category" (75). How else can one interpret this multi-layered text with its random shifts in storylines in which, as the focalizing character Christine says, "nothing is ever finished" (Gallant, The Pegnitz Junction 84)? Gallant's work contains elements of classic realism but it escapes the strictures of this mode; her work has some of the elements of modernism and yet it also veers into postmodernism. The reader/critic needs a new approach, one that avoids the above problems of classification, in order to determine how Gallant's language works.

Roland Barthes, rather than dividing texts into categories such as classic realism, modernism, postmodernism, etc., separates them into binary opposites: readerly or writerly. Classic realism corresponds to what Barthes would define as the readerly text. In the introduction to S/Z, Barthes writes: "We call any readerly text a classic text" (4). In the readerly

text, "the reader or viewer is reduced to an involuntary rehearsal of what has already been written" (Silverman 242); "the classic [readerly] text is finally nothing more than a large-scale predication, i.e. a statement which defines and situates a subject" (Silverman 245). Barthes' preference is not for the readerly but the writerly text, the text which "engages the reader or viewer in a productive rather than a consumptive capacity" (Silverman 246). Barthes' classifications, when applied to Gallant's texts, open new areas of meaning through which the reader can dis-cover<sup>‡</sup> the plurality of Gallant's texts.

The role of the reader and/or critic in establishing the 'truth' or 'truths' of Gallant's texts has been noted by several critics. Barbara Godard writes: "That the role of the reader is foregrounded in Gallant's texts should be underlined" (75). Ronald Hatch says of the Linnet Muir stories that "one can sense the act of writing itself becoming a process of participation" ("Three" 113). Robertson Davies comments that Gallant does not make judgemental comments about her characters: "she makes her readers use them, and that is her art. She deploys, displays, exhibits, and leaves the judgements up to us" (70). Winfried Siemerling writes that Gallant's texts, especially her "superb, lingering endings [leave] ample space for uncertainty and work on the reader's part" (136). This focus upon the participatory role of the reader in creating meaning corresponds to Barthes' goal for the reader: "the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (S/Z 4). In Gallant's texts, the reader participates in creating "a plurality of meaning" (Barthes,

"From Work to Text" 715); by definition, then, Gallant's texts are writerly texts.

The writerly text is not, like the readerly text, a product; instead, it is a production. No text, however, could be a completely writerly text; Belsey writes that, "[t]he totally writable [writerly], plural text does not exist" (105). There is always, at the end of interpretation, a product which the reader/critic has created through the act of reading. "The writerly text is one which the reader or viewer has obliged to reveal the terms of its own construction" (Silverman 246); the writerly text is created by the reader/critic. In order to create the writerly text,

we require a second operation, consequent upon the evaluation which has separated the texts, more delicate than that evaluation, based upon the appreciation of a certain quantity--the more or less each text can mobilize. This new operation is interpretation . . . . To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it. (Barthes, S/Z 5).

And, as Belsey writes in Critical Practice: "the plural text requires the production of meanings through the identification of its polyphony" (105). The task in dis-covering the writerly text, in creating the meanings of a text, is to identify the different voices of the text, its polyphony. Belsey calls this

process deconstruction<sup>8</sup> and writes: "Deconstruction in order to reconstruct the text as a newly intelligible, plural [my emphasis] object is the work of criticism" (105). For the reader/critic,

[t]he aim is to locate the point of contradiction within the text, the point at which it transgresses the limits within which it is constructed, breaks free of the constraints imposed by its own realist form. Composed of contradictions, the text is no longer restricted to a single, harmonious and authoritative reading. Instead it becomes plural [Belsey's emphasis] . . . an object of work by the reader to produce meaning. (Belsey 104)

In order to identify the different voices of the text, "to examine the process of its production" (Belsey 104), and to locate the points of contradiction, one needs a critical apparatus. An apparatus which lends itself to this task is the one delineated by Roland Barthes in S/Z. Barthes, in his analysis of Balzac's "Sarrasine," creates a model for examining the plurality of meaning in a text, a model which includes five codes: the proairetic, semic, hermeneutic, symbolic, and cultural (or referential) codes. These five codes braid together the signifiers of the text to form the text in its entirety. In Barthes' words: "The five codes create a kind of network, a topos through which the entire text passes (or rather, in passing, becomes text)" (S/Z 20).

While Barthes' five codes offer a means of identifying the

different voices of the text, Barthes' model must be modified if it is to be useful in the analysis of the writerly aspects of Gallant's texts. Belsey writes that:

though it [S/Z] offers a model in one sense--it implies a new kind of critical practice--it would be almost certainly not possible ( or useful) to attempt a wholesale imitation of its critical methods. (106)

Belsey argues that "S/Z is itself a polyphonic critical text" (105), which contains no summary conclusions and makes no attempt to provide an authoritative method of criticism. What I propose to do in this thesis is to use the codes to examine the writerly aspects of two of Gallant's texts and thereby reveal the terms of their construction and the points at which they break free from the restraints of fixed meaning and become plural.

In the process of adapting Barthes' codes to the task of examining the writerly elements of Gallant work, one must be mindful that, by Barthes' own definitions, two of his codes do not contribute to the writerly aspect of a text. One is the "proairetic code [which] determines the sequence of events within a story" (Silverman 262). In essence, the proairetic code is equivalent to the plot of the story. Barthes states that "the proairetic sequence is never more than the result of an artifice of reading" (S/Z 19); the act of reading creates the movement of the proairetic code as the reader is impelled forward in his/her desire to know what happens next. The

proairetic code, therefore, contributes to the readerly aspect of a text: Barthes writes that the action sequences of the proairetic code "constitute the strongest armature of the readerly [text]" (S/Z 204). The purpose of this essay is to dis-cover the writerly, not the readerly elements of Gallant's texts; therefore, I will not be discussing the proairetic code in detail, except at the points where the code transgresses its own limitations and thereby contributes to the writerly aspects of the texts under analysis.<sup>9</sup>

Barthes also classifies the hermeneutic code as a code which contributes to the readerly elements of a text. The hermeneutic code revolves around the solving of the enigma or central mystery of a text. For example, in Barthes' critical text, "Sarrasine," the enigma centers around the identity of the title character. By the end of the story, the reader has discovered both Sarrasine's identity and his ambiguous sexual nature (Sarrasine is a eunuch). The enigma of the text has been solved. Kaja Silverman writes that "[t]he hermeneutic code inscribes the desire for closure and 'truth'" (257). In Barthes' words: "the hermeneutic terms structure the enigma according to the expectation and desire for its solution" (Barthes, S/Z 75). The reader's expectations of a solution propel the text irreversibly forward, in the same way that the actions which comprise the proairetic code move the plot forward towards its inevitable ending. At the same time, however, the hermeneutic code must delay the final disclosure of the truth of the text. As Barthes writes:

the problem is to maintain the enigma in the initial void of its answer; whereas the sentences quicken the story's "unfolding" and cannot help but move the story along, the hermeneutic code performs an opposite action: it must set up delays (obstacles, stoppages, deviations) in the flow of the discourse. (S/Z 75)

At the end of these delays, however, the reader expects that the 'truth' will be revealed. "Expectation thus becomes the basic condition for truth: truth, these narratives tell us, is what is at the end of expectation" (Barthes, S/Z 76). In the readerly text, the reader's expectations of 'truth' are eventually satisfied; however, in the writerly text these expectations are transgressed. The constraints of the hermeneutic code and the points at which these constraints are broken offer one area for discovering the writerly aspects of a text which masquerades as classic realism. For this reason, I have chosen to examine the working of the hermeneutic code in "Its Image on the Mirror," my example of the (seemingly) readerly text. In the same way, in a writerly text such as "The Pegnitz Junction," an examination of the points at which the constraints of the hermeneutic code are transgressed reveals the degree to which it is a writerly text, the "more or less [the] text can mobilize" (Barthes, S/Z 5).

Barthes expands upon the codes through a musical analogy: "The area of the (readerly) text is comparable at every point to a (classical) musical score" (S/Z 28). He sub-divides the codes



into two groups: reversible and irreversible. The proairetic and the hermeneutic codes are classified as irreversible, limited by time. The two irreversible codes limit the plurality of a text: "What blocks its [the text's] reversibility is just what limits the plural nature of the classic text" (S/Z 30). Barthes classifies the remaining codes (the semic, symbolic and cultural codes) as reversible: these codes "establish permutable, reversible connections, outside the constraint of time" (S/Z 30). These codes all contribute to the plural nature of a text. "The semic code represents the major device for thematizing persons, objects, or places" (Silverman 251); in a very simplified way, the semic code corresponds to characterization and setting in a text. For example, in "Sarrasine," the title itself is part of the semic code for it is a signifier attached to the central character, Sarrasine. The title also introduces the symbolic code, which is linked "to the formulation of antitheses, especially that variety which admits of no mediation between its terms" (Silverman 270). In "Sarrasine," the central symbolic antithesis is between male and female; the confusion between the spheres of male and female caused by Sarrasine, a eunuch, pervades the text. This symbolic antithesis is also part of the cultural code as the "symbolic code is really no more than an extension or subset of the cultural code, whose structuring oppositions it articulates" (Silverman 274). The cultural code refers to the "body of knowledge" (Barthes, S/Z 205) or the "bourgeois ideology" (S/Z 206) which establishes the "culture" or "cultural identity" of the text. The sexual and cultural ramifications of the

existence of a character such as Sarrasine are expressed within the cultural code.

All of the codes braid together so to examine one is to examine many. As has been mentioned above, the symbolic code is a subset of the cultural code. In addition, Silverman writes that "the semic code always operates in close conjunction with the cultural codes" (255). Another example of two intertwined codes is the link between the semic and hermeneutic codes:

Barthes observes that 'semic space is glued to hermeneutic space' in that what the hermeneutic code moves toward (i.e. a 'profound or final space') is nothing other than a signified which refuses to connote. (Silverman 257)

An examination of any one code, therefore, includes an examination of any one or all of the other codes. Barthes mixes his discussion of the codes depending on the lexia or "units of reading" (Barthes, S/Z 13) he is examining. Barthes' lexia range from "a few words [to] . . . several sentences" (S/Z 13) and his division of the text into lexia is, as he admits, "arbitrary in the extreme" (S/Z 13). This method contributes to the writerly aspects of his own text, S/Z. I have already discussed why it is not practical "to attempt a wholesale imitation of its [S/Z's] critical methods" (Belsey 106). However, I shall attempt to tailor Barthes's methods of analysis to the works I am examining.

I have selected two representative examples of Gallant's

work for examination: "Its Image on the Mirror" from the collection My Heart is Broken and "The Pegnitz Junction," the title story from a later collection. Because of the nature of Barthes' critical model, a detailed analysis of Gallant's entire body of work (which is not yet complete) would preclude any in-depth analyses of the individual texts: S/Z itself, an analysis of a short story of less than thirty pages (in translation), runs to over two hundred pages plus appendices. I have chosen two of Gallant's longer pieces of fiction--"Its Image on the Mirror" is one hundred pages, "The Pegnitz Junction" eighty-eight--even though Gallant is primarily a writer of short stories. Judith Skelton Grant says of Gallant's novels and novellas that, when "read against the background of the stories, they seem similar in thrust and form, and different only in their greater length" (37). The longer lengths of these two works offer more scope in which to examine the workings of the codes. These two texts offer what appear to be the two extreme examples of Barthes' classifications for texts: the readerly text and the writerly text. "Its Image on the Mirror," published in 1964, contains many elements of the readerly or classic realist text; "The Pegnitz Junction," published in 1973, is the most perfect example, to date, of the postmodern text in Gallant's body of work. However, upon closer examination, both texts reveal themselves to be writerly texts.

"Its Image on the Mirror" offers two interesting areas for examination of its aspects as a writerly text. The first area is the semic code, which is "the voice of the Person" (Barthes, S/Z 21). "Its Image on the Mirror" is a first-person narration

in which the narrator, Jean Price, attempts to define her own identity. Through my analysis of the semic code, I shall demonstrate how her failure to define herself contributes to the writerly aspects of this text. Given the close ties between the semic and symbolic codes, I will also examine how the symbolic code functions in this text. Similarly, the discussion of the cultural code will be implicit in the first section as "the semic code always operates in close conjunction with the cultural codes" (Silverman 255) and the "symbolic code is really no more than an extension or subset of the cultural code, whose structuring oppositions it articulates" (Silverman 274). A second area for examination of the writerly aspects of this text is the hermeneutic code. The hermeneutic code offers interesting possibilities for a critic confronting a text which appears to be a readerly text and yet which, upon closer analysis, reveals itself to be a writerly text.

In "The Pegnitz Junction" a different method of operation is at work. Kaja Silverman observes that "in many classic texts a single powerful cultural code subordinates the proairetic, semic, symbolic, and hermeneutic activities" (251). This is the case with "The Pegnitz Junction," although it is not a classic realist text. An examination of its cultural code, therefore, encompasses an examination of the other codes. In my analysis of "The Pegnitz Junction," I have focused on the cultural code, although the other codes are also discussed within the primary analysis of the cultural code.

Catherine Belsey claims that: "Deconstruction in order to

reconstruct the text as a newly intelligible, plural object is the work of criticism" (105). The purpose of this thesis is to examine the writerly qualities of two of Gallant's texts in order to dis-cover the terms of their construction and thereby reveal their plural natures as writerly texts.

## in "Its Image on the Mirror"

## I

The meaning of "Its Image on the Mirror" appears to be 'fixed', limited to a single interpretation. In addition to a 'fixed' meaning, the novella has several characteristics of the readerly or classic realist text: 1) the presentation of 'reality' in the novella corresponds to the reader's idea of 'reality' (illusionism); 2) a problem (question) is posed at the beginning of the novella and seemingly answered by the end (closure); and, 3) an authoritative voice presents the 'truth' of the story (hierarchy of discourses).<sup>1</sup> However, upon re-reading "Its Image on the Mirror," the reader discovers several points of contradiction, points at which the text becomes plural, no longer limited to a single fixed meaning.

Following Barthes' lead, I shall begin my analysis of the semic and symbolic codes in "Its Image on the Mirror" with the title itself. The title is taken from William Yeats' "The Shadowy Waters," a long, dramatic poem, of which a stanza is included as an epigraph to the story. The first words of the stanza, "What is love itself," would seem to suggest that love is the image referred to in the novella's title. The image of love, its likeness or imitation, would then be the subject of the text. The word 'image' carries an association of falseness; just as Plato distrusted 'mimesis' or the imitation of an object because this secondary object is less real than the original, so too would the 'image' of love stir up connotations of false or weak love. But as the reader reads on, she realizes that the

image referred to is not love but a dream. The initial question is answered: love is "dreams that hurry from beyond the world." The stanza concludes: "Fellow-wanderer,/ Could we but mix ourselves into a dream/ Not in its image on the mirror!" (55).<sup>2</sup> The dream itself is love and the image is of a dream. Here we no longer have mimesis: the imitation of love, its image on the mirror. We have second-order mimesis--an imitation of an imitation--the image of a dream. The 'reality' portrayed in the story is in question even before the opening words.

The epigraph provides the central structuring force of the symbolic code in "Its Image on the Mirror." The symbolic code is linked "to the formulation of antitheses, especially that variety which admits of no mediation between its terms" (Silverman 270). In "Sarrasine," Barthes' text for analysis, the central symbolic antithesis is between male and female. In "Its Image on the Mirror," confusion between male and female roles is one of the symbolic antitheses which structures the text but it is not the central one. The central antithesis is between the dream or ideal world and the real.

The concluding passage of the text encapsulates the central antithesis of the symbolic code in "Its Image on the Mirror."

We had slipped into our winter as trustingly as every night we fall asleep. 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!" We would

waken thinking the earth must stop, now, so that we could be shed from it like snow. I knew, that night, we would not be shed, but would remain, because that was the way it was. We would survive, and waking-- because there was no help for it--forget our dreams and return to life. (155)

In this passage, the events of the novella become a dream from which the narrator and the other characters will awaken. The dreams which the narrator mentions--"love remembered, a house recovered and lost, a climate imagined, a journey never made"--all refer to events in the novella. In the narrator's version, these events become dreams, unreal events, which the characters will forget upon returning to 'reality'. The final passage of the novella negates the seeming reality of the previous hundred pages. At the same time, the passage affirms the writerly nature of the text. The reader, who has accepted the appearance of reality--illusionism in Belsey's words--is now confronted with a point of contradiction, a point at which the apparent meaning of the text becomes fluid, unfixed.

The four specific dreams mentioned by the narrator in the final passage of the novella are exposed as writerly events at the time of their narration. For example, the dream of "a house recovered and lost" refers to Jean's parents' house in Allenton, which she describes in the opening paragraphs of the novella. Jean creates a detailed word-picture of the scene on her parents' moving day. She includes several specific references to people and their settings: the real estate agent is opening



the door of the house; "[a] gardener kneels before a row of stones" (58); "On the west lawn, where the copper beech has shed a few leaves, a tall priest in black points" (58). These narrative details fix the scene in the reader's mind and create an illusion of reality. And then Jean negates the reality of the entire scene with the following words:

My mother says I saw nothing of the kind. She says the priest had called in the morning, but was nowhere around when we left. She says she remarked: "I suppose they'll have the typical institutional garden, phlox with white stones," and that I imagined the gardener because of that. (58)

Jean constructs a version of reality out of her mother's comments and the actual scene. Given the absence of any authoritative version of the scene (neither Jean nor her mother is presented as a completely reliable source and the author is silent) the reader must choose between the alternatives offered. The appearance of reality is negated by Jean's construction of the scene.

Another example of the writerly nature of this text can be found in the description of "a climate imagined," which refers to the home of Isobel, Jean's sister. Jean describes Isobel's home in the following words: "Isobel lives in Venezuela now, in a climate I can only imagine" (97). Earlier on in the text, at the time when Isobel leaves for Venezuela, Jean writes:

Isobel was in romantic Caracas, which I began to construct, feverishly, as a paradise of coral islands. I could not have found it on a map, and confused it with Bermuda. (64)

Jean's description of her method of picturing Isobel's home is telling: "I began to construct [Caracas]." Jean constructs her own version of reality, a reality which does not necessarily bear any resemblance to the 'true' reality. Illusionism, in Belsey's sense of the word, becomes illusion, a misconception or false idea. The reader (and Jean) both realize the falseness of Jean's image of "romantic Caracas" but no corrective image is given. The reader, like Jean, must construct her own image of "the climate imagined."

The imagined climate is associated with Jean's dream of a "love remembered." This love, this dream which Jean wishes she could be part of rather than "its image on the mirror," is the love between Isobel, Jean's sister, and her lover, Alec Campbell. At one point in the novella, while Isobel is speaking to Alec on the phone, Jean thinks: "Isobel was removed from us to a warmer world, to a climate I could sense but not capture, like a secret, muddled idea I had of Greece, or the south, or being warm" (136-137). Love is compared to a climate, a climate which Jean can only imagine. Jean writes of the two lovers:

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. (98)

Again, Jean is grasping for 'truth'. She tries to construct a factual image of Isobel and Alec's love affair out of the scraps of information she has about them; however, Jean herself questions her own version of the love affair. She is drawn to the affair--she writes that "[n]o romantic story of my own (if ever I'd had one) tormented me as much as her [Isobel's] story with Alec Campbell" (91)--but she is shut out from the 'truth', both by her own naivete and by Isobel's secretive nature.

The final dream mentioned, the "journey never made," is an enigma; it is, in itself, an example of the writerly nature of the text. There are at least two possible interpretations of the "journey never made." The first involves the scene in which Isobel tells Jean of her pregnancy. Jean attempts a moment of physical communion with her sister.

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 knelt on the bed near my sister and 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." (153)

The "journey never made" becomes a metaphor for the distance

between the two sisters, a distance which expresses itself in their inability to connect. This distance between the sisters is foreshadowed by an event which takes place earlier in the text but later in chronological time: the visit of Isobel and her Venezuelan husband and children to her parents' cottage. At the end of the visit, Jean writes, "Isobel was going, and had said nothing to me. She had not spoken at all. There was no limit to the size of the world and we would never find each other in it again" (77). In another example, Jean describes an unsatisfactory visit with her sister and concludes that "the greatest distance was between us, the sisters" (97). The emotional distance between the sisters is never bridged; it is "the journey never made."

A second interpretation of "the journey never made" opens from a statement made by Jean on the penultimate page of the text. Speaking of her husband, Tom, Jean writes, "[h]is memory is for dates, not for feelings; even today he will insist that we last saw Isobel in 1958 and not 1955, as I tell it" (154). The metaphoric "journey never made" becomes a literal journey of the two sisters towards each other, one which Tom affirms and Jean denies. Who is to be believed? By her very words at the end of the text, Jean denies the validity of any of the narrated events: her story is made up of "dreams which hurry from beyond the world."

D. B. Jewison cites this discrepancy surrounding the date of Isobel's last visit as an example of Jean's lack of authority as a narrator. Jewison writes:

Many of the judgements she [Jean] makes about people are very questionable, although it is sometimes difficult to tell just where the truth lies. With dates, the difference between fact and misstatement is clear and thus Jean's authority is severely undermined. (102)

There are two problems with this conclusion: 1) at least one of Jewison's contentions about mistaken dates is itself based on a mistake;<sup>3</sup> and 2) Jean herself acknowledges that she is unreliable about dates and other events, both in the quotation about Tom and in other instances in the text. Jewison's contention that, in this particular text, "Gallant's typical subtlety and ambiguity . . . [arise] from the questionable authority of the narrative presence" (101), only partially addresses the issue of the contradictions created by Jean's narration. The question of narrative authority in "Its Image on the Mirror" and its contribution to the writerly quality of the text deserves closer attention.

Lorna Irvine, speaking of the narrative technique of "Its Image on the Mirror," calls Jean "a reflector" (134). The idea of Jean as a narrator who 'mirrors' the events and characters surrounding her is echoed by other critics. Neil Besner writes that:

Jean Price, the first-person narrator, presents readers with mirror images of characters and scenes, flat portraits which she transcribes with scrupulous objectivity, as if she were transcribing from memory. (28)

Jean's narration is structured by what Besner calls "the tyranny of form--of snapshots, portraits, pictures, tableaux, framed still lifes--" (38). All of these methods of describing life, plus the "scrupulous objectivity" which Jean uses, aid Jean in her presentation of herself as a person who has the 'truth'. Through her narrative technique, Jean attempts to convince the reader that her version of events is the authoritative one. The reader remains unconvinced and frequently assigns different meanings to events and characters than the ones Jean ascribes to them. This would seem to indicate that Jean is an unreliable narrator who, despite her narrative technique of "mirroring" events for the reader, is unable to present the 'truth'. This would be true if the text presented one authoritative 'truth'.

"Its Image on the Mirror" is a writerly text and in it meaning and truth remain fluid. Jean cannot fix the meaning of her story or her life and she cannot offer 'truth' to the reader. As Neil Besner writes, "[w]hen Jean leaves images alone for a moment, they speak a language; they are free of her self-conscious attempts to fix absolute meaning" (37). Jean tries to create a readerly text, in which meaning is fixed and absolute; instead, her story is a writerly text, in which the reader must sift through meanings. Jean's narrative technique, in which she both affirms and denies her own unreliability, adds to the writerly nature of the text.

Jean is an unreliable narrator not only because she, whether deliberately or unintentionally, distorts the 'truth' of her narrative but because there is no 'truth' to be found. Jean, in her search to bridge the gap between reality and

dreams, attempts to present her version of the 'truth' to the reader. But behind Jean's version of events, the reader can perceive other versions. One of these is the author's version of the events in the text. Janice Kulyk Keefer writes that "for all that Gallant excoriates Jean's WASP prudishness and aridity, she confers upon her the narrative authority to enforce a closed, diminished view of life" (50). This statement expresses the layers of meaning contained in the narrative of the text. On one level (for the reader who takes Jean's version at face value) Jean's narrative does present a "closed, diminished view of life." At another level, Jean does not really have narrative authority; the reader can sense the presence of Gallant behind Jean's comments. Wayne Booth, in The Rhetoric of Fiction, classifies the difference between reliable and unreliable narrators in the following sentence: "I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not" (158-159). Jean can be classified as an unreliable narrator because at certain points in the text the reader can sense the distance between Jean's view of events and the hidden irony in Jean's words, an irony apparent to both Gallant and the reader but hidden from Jean.

A description of Mrs. Duncan, the narrator's mother, helps to point out the gap between the narrator and the author's views of persons and events. Jean is describing the day her parents moved from the house they had lived in for all of their married life. Jean writes that, although the move must have been emotionally difficult for her mother, "She [Mrs. Duncan] said

not a word about it, and expected no embarrassing behavior from me" (65). Jean goes on to describe how she views her mother:

She was small, commanding, and permitted no backchat. My mother has lived every day of her life as if it were preparation for some sort of crisis. You could look straight through her and find not a sand-grain of weakness or compassion or pity: nothing to start up emotional rot. (65-66)

In Jean's voice, the words are an expression of praise of her mother; the concluding two words, "emotional rot," dismiss the need for emotions like compassion and pity (which have already been linked with weakness). It is the reader who views Mrs. Duncan as an emotional tyrant. Jean cannot see the irony inherent in her description; indeed, just a few paragraphs earlier, Jean says of her mother: "I am pleased to be like her. There is no one I admire more" (65). The reader is the one who can read behind the words to see one facet of the 'truth' about Mrs. Duncan. If this were the only 'truth' about the character, then "Its Image on the Mirror" could be classified strictly as a classic realist text. Catherine Belsey's comment about authorial authority in classic realism may help clarify my meaning. Belsey writes that in the classic realist text:

The reader is invited to perceive and judge the 'truth' of the text, the coherent, non-contradictory



interpretation of the world as it is perceived by an author whose autonomy is the source and evidence of the truth of the interpretation. (68-69)

If "Its Image on the Mirror" were true classic realism, a readerly text with only one meaning, then only one reading of Mrs. Duncan's character would be possible. The reader would see the 'truth' about Mrs. Duncan, that she is an emotional tyrant, despite Jean's misguided views about her mother. The reader would be supported in this view of Mrs. Duncan by the author, Mavis Gallant. This is not the case.

Mrs. Duncan's character must be judged through Jean's presentation of her character and Jean's presentation is unreliable. Wayne Booth, citing Henry James's definition of the unreliable narrator, writes that unreliability in a narrator "is most often a matter of what James calls inconscience; the narrator is mistaken, or he believes himself to have qualities which the author denies him" (159). These criteria hold true for the narrator at some points in the text, but are invalid at other points. In other words, sometimes Jean is mistaken in her perception of herself, other characters, and events in the text and sometimes she is not. Sometimes the reader can recognize that Gallant does not want us to accept Jean's words at face value. Sometimes the words themselves are the reader's only guide. In the above example about Mrs. Duncan, the reader can assume, with a certain degree of certainty, that Gallant wishes us to interpret Jean's words ironically. In the following two examples, this assumption cannot be so readily made.

Catherine Belsey states that in a readerly text a "coherent, non-contradictory interpretation of the world" (68-69) is easily perceivable to the reader. In "Its Image on the Mirror" contradictions abound. The narrator's mother, Mrs. Duncan, as demonstrated in the above paragraphs, is presented by Jean as a woman who is thoroughly in control of her own emotions. On the day of her move from the house she has lived in all her married life, Mrs. Duncan does not cry and "expected no embarrassing behaviour" (65) from her daughter. Yet a few pages later, Jean observes her parents holding hands in a public restaurant. She says that "[f]or the first time in my life, I saw my parents holding hands. . . . It was the singularity of the gesture that made me uneasy. Their tenderness seemed a sign of their defeat" (69). Jean's reaction to the public hand-holding is to feel "cold with shame" (70) and to think, "I'm not like either of them, really. My children will be different too" (70). The reader, at this point, recognizes that it is Jean's perception of Mrs. Duncan as emotionally rigid that creates the reader's impression of Mrs. Duncan. Jean needs to see her mother as someone who has "not a sand-grain of weakness or compassion or pity" (66). Is Mrs. Duncan really this way? Jean's description would seem to suggest she is; the above example would seem to suggest she is not.

Another scene, which takes place (or may take place) after Jean's brother's death, adds another layer of meaning to the reader's perception of Mrs. Duncan's character. Jean and her sister Isobel have come home after hearing of Frank's death in England. Jean writes:

One night I saw, or thought I saw, or may have dreamed, that my father sat on the stairs weeping. Our mother stood a few steps below him so that their faces were nearly level. . . . Patient, waiting, she held a glass of water to his lips as if control could be taken like a pill. Everything in that scene, which I must have dreamed, spoke of the terror of pity. (147)

The final comment is Jean's perception of the scene. Whether or not it is an accurate assessment of the scene (which may never have occurred) is impossible to tell. There is no authoritative, non-contradictory version of Mrs. Duncan's character, of the other characters, or of the events which occur or do not occur during the narrative. The unreliable nature of Jean's narration contributes to the confusion between dreams and reality in the text (the symbolic code).

## II

The unreliable nature of Jean's narration also causes some of the confusion about the nature of the individual characters in the text (the semic code). In "Its Image on the Mirror" the symbolic code is directly linked to the semic code. As narrator, Jean is not only unreliable, she also frequently calls attention to her own unreliability. She questions her own version of events, introduces other characters' viewpoints and, at the end of the text, denies the validity of any of the events narrated. All of these narrative techniques work within the symbolic code, heightening the fluidity of meaning and 'truth'

within this code. They also work within the semic code. Within a text, "[t]he semic code represents the major device for thematizing persons, objects, or places" (Silverman 251). Barthes calls the semic code "the Voice of the Person" (S/Z 21). The voice of the person in "Its Image on the Mirror" is the narrator, Jean Price. Jean Price is the voice which gives the reader one version of the events of the text. As both narrator and a central character, Jean's characterization (which is part of the semic code) helps to create the layers of meaning in the text.

The symbolic code is linked to the semic code through the way in which Mavis Gallant creates her characters. Mavis Gallant uses oppositions within the symbolic code to develop her characters. Two secondary works have contributed to my understanding of the psychological processes by which Gallant constructs her characters in this text: Kaja Silverman's chapter entitled "The Subject" from her book The Subject of Semiotics in which she discusses Jacques Lacan's model for the formation of an individual identity; and Belsey's analysis of the writing of Lacan in "Addressing the Subject" in Critical Practice. Lacan's model has several similarities with Barthes' codes. In terms of Barthes' codes, the symbolic register (the fourth register of the Lacanian model) would be expressed within the symbolic code: the oppositions within the symbolic code would be played out within the family's "closed system of signification" (Silverman 182). The family, in turn, and the identity which it confers upon an individual, would be expressed within the semic code. Silverman explains Lacan's definition of

the closed family system in the following way:

"mother" and "father" are binary terms within a closed system of signification; each sustains its value and meaning through its relation to the other, and not through any reference to the real. (182)

Oppositions within the symbolic code are self-defining; each signifier gains its meaning through its definition against another signifier. There is no final reference point: no ultimate signified. This understanding of meaning corresponds to Barthes' writerly text; Lacan's model, therefore, offers another way of approaching "Its Image on the Mirror" as a writerly text.

Lacan's model incorporates four stages towards subjectivity (the formation of an individual identity). Silverman describes these stages in the following way:

Lacan's theory of the subject reads like a classic narrative--it begins with birth, and then moves in turn through the territorialization of the body, the mirror stage, access to language, and the Oedipus complex.

The last two of these events belong to what Lacan calls the symbolic order, and they mark the subject's coming of age within a culture. (150)

The first stage, "territorialization of the body," occurs when a child first recognizes "objects which are not clearly

distinguished from the self and which are not fully grasped as other" (Silverman 156). The second stage occurs when the child recognizes itself in a mirror: the mirror stage. This stage corresponds to Freud's model for the formation of the ego, in which "[t]he ego is formed through a series of identifications with objects external to it" (Silverman 134). In both cases, the subject is defining itself through an external object; as Silverman explains, this stage can also be called the "loss of the real" (176), for "to know oneself through an external image is to be defined through self-alienation" (158). The mirror stage is particularly significant to the construction of character in "Its Image on the Mirror."

In "Its Image on the Mirror" the narrator, Jean Price, defines herself through other characters. In one sense, the other characters in the text, particularly her sister, Isobel, function as what Freud defines as a superego: "The ego ideal or superego functions throughout the history of the subject as the mirror [my emphasis] in which the ego sees what it should be, but never can be" (Silverman 135). Isobel is the mirror in which Jean sees herself. The subject of the title of the text, the image on the mirror, now becomes not a dream but a person. The person is Isobel, who is the ideal image Jean wishes to be.

If the image on the mirror is Isobel, the image which Jean has always wished to be, then the text itself is an exploration of Jean's desire to be Isobel. Kaja Silverman writes:

It is probably most helpful to think of the mirror stage as always occurring from within the symbolic

order, and as an event which is in some way culturally orchestrated. Lacan himself encourages us to conceptualize the mirror stage along these lines, since he describes it as a moment which is only retrospectively realized--realized from a position within language, and within the symbolic. (161)

Jean's narrative, when understood in terms of Lacanian psychology, is an attempt to realize her desire to be Isobel. Jean realizes this desire through language: she explores her obsession with her 'image' through language.

The acquisition of language is the third register of Lacan's model. Language, for Lacan, is a closed system of signifiers; "meaning emerges as the result of a play of differences within a closed system" (Silverman 163). Within this closed system, the subject constructs its identity: Belsey writes of "Lacan's theory of the subject as constructed in language" (60).<sup>4</sup> And how the subject constructs its identity is through its desire for 'the Other'.<sup>5</sup> Desire for 'the Other' is desire for what the subject itself can never be: "desire is directed toward ideal representations which remain forever beyond the subject's reach" (Silverman 176). This desire is both created and denied within the signifying system of language.

Not only does language provide the agency for self-loss, but cultural representations supply the standard by which that loss is perceived. We look within the mirror

of those representations--representations which structure every moment of our existence--not only to discover what we are, but what we can never hope to be and (as a consequence) hopelessly desire. (Silverman 177)<sup>6</sup>

The final register of Lacan's model is the Oedipus complex. Lacan drew upon the writing of the anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss, and his analysis of symbolic networks for his fourth stage of the formation of the subject. Levi-Strauss was looking at the role of the incest taboo in "establishing a grid of structural relationships" (Silverman 179). For Levi-Strauss, "the family is perceived primarily in terms of its capacity to confer identity upon its members" (Silverman 180). Language plays a role in establishing identity within the family, for "Language, even more than kinship rules, ensures that all of the members of a group inhabit the same psychic territory" (Silverman 180).<sup>7</sup> Language and the structural relationship of the family define the role of the individual.

Gallant's examination of the family structure in "Its Image on the Mirror" mirrors the Lacanian model. Mavis Gallant spent several of her formative years under the guardianship of a Freudian psychiatrist and may have been influenced by the Freudian theories of subjectivity.<sup>8</sup> Whatever the influence, the construction of her characters in this text, and especially of the narrator, Jean Price, corresponds closely to the construction of subjectivity in the Lacanian model. I would like to demonstrate this point by analysing Jean's construction of her identity with reference to the final three stages of the



Lacanian model.

Isobel is the standard by which Jean judges herself, the mirror in which Jean sees the idealized image she can never be. Jean says of Isobel:

I was always putting myself in my sister's place, adopting her credulousness, and even her memories, I saw, could be made mine. It was Isobel I imagined as the eternal heroine--never myself. (84)

Isobel is what Jean can never be: the favourite daughter, the desired sister. Jean marries her husband, Tom, after Isobel has rejected him and, in consequence, is never certain that she is the sister he really wanted. Jean wonders:

Did he think he would wake up one day and find my sister instead of me in his bed? Did he believe I could lose five years, grow four inches, speak with a different voice? Did he think I would become bored with Jean and decide to be Isobel? (105)

Isobel is the object of desire, for Alex (her lover), for Tom, and for Jean. Near the end of the novella, Jean says of Isobel: "She was the most beautiful girl I had ever known, even now, with her hair dark at the roots, her eyes yellow and circled; she was still the most elusive, the most loved" (153). This description occurs after Isobel has confessed about her love affair and her pregnancy. Just before Isobel confesses, Jean thinks:

Our wishes are granted when we are least ready. How often had I prowled around her house, waiting for a word, a half-open door, a sleeping sentry, so that I could see what it was to be Isobel [my emphasis], to have Alec, to be loved? (149-150)

Jean wishes to be Isobel; she wishes to become that idealized image which she sees on the mirror.

Jean's desire to become Isobel is the basis for her own constructed identity. Identity, or naming, is a part of the semic code. The semic or naming code "operates by grouping a number of signifiers around either a proper name, or another signifier which functions temporarily as if it were a proper name" (Silverman 251). The purpose of grouping signifiers around a central subject is to give the subject meaning and to establish identity: the subject has a constructed identity which is made up of all of the signifiers which are attached to it. Jean constructs her own identity by articulating her differences from and similarities to other characters in her narrative. And she accomplishes this task through language. Jean defines herself through language; her text is her own attempt to construct her identity.

Language in "Its Image on the Mirror" reflects Jean's attempts to construct her identity. Jean is defined for the reader not only by what she says she is but also by the language she uses (and sometimes rejects or changes) to describe herself and those around her. Jean Price is a narrator who recognizes the power of language to define differences between people. For

example, she defines the difference between English and French Canadians by saying:

When my sister and my brother and I were children we thought there was a difference in physical substance between people who spoke English exactly as we did and the rest of mankind. I think my parents still believe it . . . (59).

This difference is culturally defined (i.e. constructed within a given culture) and identifiable through spoken language. Jean says that Isobel "knew Greeks, Italians, refugees, Jews: people from the north end of the city who could not pronounce 'th' and never would" (94). Of Isobel's Italian husband, Jean says, "His accent was not one my mother would like" (72). All of these variations from English spoken exactly as Jean speaks it mark people as 'other', different and, in Jean's view, unacceptable. The language which Jean speaks and writes and her comments about other characters' use of language culturally define Jean for the reader.

Language also defines Jean's emotional limitations. Jean and her family avoid certain words. When Isobel was dying, Jean says, "We admitted we loved her--we who dread the word" (105). Jean describes Isobel's second marriage as 'unfortunate' and then elaborates by saying, "I am shy before words like 'calamity' or 'catastrophe' or disgrace" (61). Jean's rejection of certain words, words which are 'loaded' with emotional meaning, demonstrates her inability to accept her own

emotions. In one of Jean's final descriptions of Isobel, she calls her, in a friend's words, "lavish. Personnage aux Plumes. A golden bird" (148). This description itself is far too lavish for Jean and she corrects it: "she [Isobel] was not lavish, and not golden, and not a bird. Those are fancies" (148) The words themselves are what frighten Jean into denial.

The limitations of language define the points at which the readerly text becomes a writerly text. Language, as Silverman explains, is the ultimate cultural representation by which the subject defines itself. And language, for both Barthes and Lacan, is a closed system of signifiers. There is no outside 'truth'; there is only a shifting field of signifiers, each of which defines itself through its differences from other signifiers. Just as the subject defines itself through its identification with its mirror image, so too does language define itself by means of itself: i.e. there is no outside reality.

Language in the semic code in "Its Image on the Mirror" is a closed system of signifiers. A description of Jean, from the third section of the novella, demonstrates the applicability of this point.

Isobel's sister, Jean Price, sits down, crosses her ankles, clasps her hands, smiles. . . . The stranger takes her in. She is shorter than Isobel, has small feet, is neater. Her hair is a sensible length (Isobel's straggles over the wrapper) and she is well polished, as if the surface of body, hair, skin, eyes, nails, were of a single substance, a thin shell. (95)

What is significant about this passage is the way in which it is structured as a comparison to Jean's sister, Isobel. The opening signifier is "Isobel's sister"; right from the beginning, the reader knows that the narrator is speaking of two subjects who are defined through their differences. Jean is shorter and neater than Isobel. Her hair is "a sensible length," with the implication that Isobel's hair, which "straggles over the wrapper," is not. There are no empirical statements of fact; there is only the shifting state of comparison, in which one subject is defined by its difference from (or similarity to) another.

In another passage, Jean defines herself through her similarity to her mother. Jean says, "As I grow older I see that our gestures are alike. It touches me to notice a movement of hands repeated--a manner of folding a newspaper, or laying down a comb" (65). Again, there are no empirical facts, no exact description of how both Jean and her mother fold a newspaper or put down a comb. There are only the comparisons: Jean is like her mother in this way, not like Isobel in that way. The identification of the subject with other subjects within the text is the means by which the characters construct their own identities; just as a person in the 'real world' defines herself by saying "I am this, I am not that," so do Gallant's characters define themselves through their relationships to the surrounding subjects in the text. Identity in "Its Image on the Mirror" is constructed through a series of shifting signifiers, each of which is defined solely by its relationship to other signifiers.

The final stage of Lacan's model, the Oedipus complex, is characterized by identity roles which are defined by their relationships to other roles. Jean Price defines herself by her role within the family. Her identity is defined by her roles as sister, daughter, wife, and mother. These roles, in Levi-Strauss's analysis, are more powerful than the individuals who define themselves by them.

Each individual is thus born into an already defined symbolic system, and inserted into a fully articulated family diagram. . . . The positions of "father," "mother," "daughter," and "son" all exceed the individuals who temporarily occupy them. (Silverman 180)

Identity, therefore, becomes a matter of properly fulfilling one's established role.

The Duncan family conforms, for the most part, to Levi-Strauss' analysis of the family diagram. The family is captured in a pair of sayings: "'Happy families are all alike and all's well with the Duncans'" (66). The narrator sees her family as "happy enough" (66) and "unremarkable" (66); both of these comments capture the idea that the Duncan family is 'normal', i.e. it conforms to the established and accepted symbolic system. The Duncan parents are both entirely defined by their roles; a telling example of how completely their roles encompass their identities is the fact that their first names are never given. They are identified as Mr. and Mrs. Duncan (husband and wife) or father and mother (parents). The brother,

Frank, is defined by his role as 'son'. He has been raised by his father to fill a properly masculine role: "when he was three she [his mother] relinquished him, saying she knew nothing about the upbringing of sons" (81). As an adult, Frank is comfortable in his "male head-of-family role" (135). Jean, the oldest daughter, repeats the family pattern: "I looked like any other woman of my age and my condition. I was part of my mother and father, and my children were part of me" (77).

Jean Price, the narrator of "Its Image on the Mirror," sees her world in terms of her role within the 'family'. Jean, who has "a safe marriage to a man my mother liked" (91) and a family she calls "the Price children" (69), duplicates the "defined symbolic system" (Silverman 180) of the proper family. Jean says of her husband:

He has repeated his parents' cycle--family into family: the interlocking circles. I see the circles too, for happy families are all the same, and only the unhappy families seem different. (79)

Difference is equated with unhappiness; variation from the accepted pattern is, in Jean's view, something to be avoided.

Against this "defined symbolic system" in which each character fits into his or her established role is the character of Isobel, who represents escape from the family. Isobel, in one sense, is the prime example of the writerly elements at work within this text: Isobel escapes from the boundaries established by Jean and the family structure. Jean realizes

that Isobel rejects the symbolic system by which Jean defines herself. Jean believes that, for Isobel, she represents "the pattern of life discarded, the route struck off the map" (91). In a quotation given above, Jean says "I was part of my mother and father, and my children were part of me. I had succeeded in that, and Isa had failed" (77); however, Jean's success means nothing to Isobel. Jean looks to Isobel and realizes that Isobel defines herself by different cultural standards. Isobel represents the point of contradiction within the text, the moment at which the text "transgresses the limits within which it is constructed" (Belsey 104). Neither Jean nor the reader can define Isobel through her role within the family, for Isobel breaks free from the limited meaning of this role.

Jean constructs her identity through her role; therefore, for her, Isobel's rejection of her own family role is also a rejection of Jean herself. Jean says Isobel "never laid eyes on me without wishing I was someone else" (90). Jean tries to force Isobel to recognize the family structure they share. Jean says that at parties Isobel "would treat me as if I were just anyone" (90-91); in response, Jean "would go up to her then and insist on talking about home, giving her news of Frank, forcing her to recognize me as kindred" (91). Isobel's rejection of Jean and of the role Jean embodies leads Jean, in turn, to reject Isobel. Jean writes that some people "confuse us, thinking that Jean made a bad marriage, or Jean is dead. They have forgotten who was good and who was bad" (94). For Jean, rejection of the established symbolic system is wrong. Her sister Isobel is bad, wrong, the failure. Jean is the good



sister: the one who fits into the proper family order. Jean recognizes her position as the accepted 'daughter'; she even exults in it: "I was the only daughter: I had won" (64). She constructs her identity through her identification of herself as the only daughter, the one who truly repeats the established symbolic order.

At the same time, as has been demonstrated in the discussion of the mirror stage, Jean intensely wishes to be Isobel. The entire text can be viewed as Jean's attempt to realize her desire to be Isobel, her image on the mirror. This desire, on Jean's part, for 'the Other' (represented by Isobel) is articulated by language. Just as the desire is expressed through language, so is the realization that Jean can never be Isobel. And because Jean can never be that external image, Isobel, she (the subject) has

a profoundly ambivalent relationship to that reflection. [She] loves the coherent identity which the mirror provides. However, because the image remains external to [her], [she] also hates the image. (Silverman 158)

This "ambivalent relationship" helps to explain all of Jean's contradictory comments about her sister. One of the most compressed examples occurs in the final scene of the novella. Within the space of three sentences, Jean describes Isobel as a "golden bird" (148) and "a tall, slouching, untidy girl in a faded dressing gown" (148). Isobel changes from an image of beauty, almost of myth (the image of a golden bird evokes the

idea of the phoenix), to a figure of ridicule. In the same scene, Jean calls Isobel, "the most elusive, the most loved" (153), yet a few paragraphs later, she says, "[Isobel's] movements cried her defeat. She wanted my attention, and would pay for it" (153). Love and hate are combined as Jean's emotions about Isobel shift from one extreme of the emotional scale to another.

Jean's conflicting emotions concerning Isobel contribute to the writerly nature of "Its Image on the Mirror." Jean, who structures her identity through her relationship to Isobel, can never decide whether she wishes to be her own established role (daughter, wife, mother) or its opposite (Isobel). As a text, "Its Image on the Mirror" is Jean's attempt to construct her own identity; her inability to choose between two antitheses means that her text is "[c]omposed of contradictions" (Belsey 104). Jean's image becomes one of two mirrors on which her own image doubles back on itself: reflections which stretch back infinitely. Jean captures this uncertainty about her own image:

Yet when I traced her [Isobel's] signature with my finger I felt the old unquietness, as if I must run after her into infinity, saying "Wait, I am not the person you think at all." (85)

The semic code, like the symbolic code, is never resolved: there is no single, authoritative reading for Jean's character. Through an analysis of both the symbolic and the semic codes, "Its Image on the Mirror" reveals itself as a writerly text.

## Plurality of Meaning: Closure in the Hermeneutic Code

## Introduction

Truth in fiction is multi-faceted: one's version of truth depends upon one's perspective. The narrators in Mavis Gallant's works demonstrate the fact that the truth of their stories is not solid and unchanging but mutable, uncertain. For example, Neil Besner says that the stories in My Heart is Broken, "invite readers to consider inventions, recollections, and recreations of the past by attending to the forms of the stories Gallant's narrators tell" (27). Besner stresses that the narrators' perceptions are crucial in understanding the ways in which "memory makes meaning" (27); this is especially true of the novella in the collection, "Its Image on the Mirror." The narrator of this story, Jean Price, is constructing the story of her life, and her relationship with her enigmatic sister, Isobel. Jean believes that she controls the truth about the past; she says, "I am the only person who can tell the truth about anything now, because I am, in a sense, the survivor" (141). But in fiction, 'truth', or as Barthes defines it, 'closure', is not dependable.

Belsey lists closure, the movement of a text towards a discernible meaning and an established order, as one of the three characteristics of a classic realist text. In the readerly text, the reader's expectations for closure and 'truth' are met: "the readerly text is the result of so smooth a match of the reader or

viewer with the classic textual model that the two are for all intents and purposes identical" (243). Rather than being viewed as a construct of language, the readerly text is viewed as a reflection of the reader's reality. In the readerly text, the reader's expectations are fulfilled: her 'reality' is mirrored back to her.<sup>1</sup> As Silverman writes, "[t]he readerly text purports to be a transcript of a reality which pre-exists and exceeds it" (243). However, the reader must share the cultural assumptions of the text; the reality which is created in the text must be one which the reader accepts as 'natural', which, because it is 'natural', cannot appear to be constructed.

The readerly text thus attempts to conceal all traces of itself as a factory within which a particular social reality is produced through standard representations and dominant signifying practices. (Silverman 244)

These "standard representations" and "dominant signifying practices" are the same as are found in the reality of the reader and are therefore familiar. The constructed world of the text and the equally constructed world of the reader are both formed through the same signifying practices, and reflect upon each other; however, the reader recognizes only one world as the reflection and this is the world of the text.

In the realist text, the narrator is often used by the author to create the appearance of a natural order, permanent not created. Silverman points out that

many nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels and short stories efface the signs of their actual production . . . [through] a voice within the fiction [which] claims responsibility for the discourse, thus covering over the cultural enunciation. (244)

This voice, a creation of the author, accepts the 'reality' which it presents as the natural order; the reader follows the lead of the narrative voice and accepts the 'reality' without question.

First-person narration not only masks the construction of its own 'reality', it is also one of the techniques used in modernist fiction for creating the illusion of a real world in the text. David Lodge traces the technique back to the novels of Defoe and Richardson and says that

the use of characters as narrators . . . [made] the narrative discourse a mimesis of an act of diegesis, diegesis at a second remove. These devices brought about a quantum leap in realistic illusion and immediacy. (30)

Lodge borrows the distinctions between the two terms from Plato:

In Book III of The Republic, Plato distinguishes between diegesis, the representation of actions in the poet's own voice, and mimesis, the representation of action in the imitated voices of the character, or characters. (28)

A first-person narrator combines both mimesis and diegesis: the narrative voice appears to have authorial authority (diegesis) but it is actually the imitation (mimesis) of a character's voice, behind which lurks the actual authorial voice. This "diegesis at second remove" (Lodge 30) or "second-order diegesis" (Lodge 41) both masks its own production and increases the mimetic properties of the text; however, it also carries its own dangers for the unwary reader. One of these dangers consists of putting too much faith in the narrator's version of the 'truth' of the text.

First-person narration seems to remove the author from the text, a goal which modernist authors often endorse.<sup>1</sup> In her article, "What is Style," Mavis Gallant expresses these views about her own writing style:

The manner of writing, the thread spun out of the story itself, may with time have grown instinctive. I know that the thread must hold from beginning to end, and that I would like to be invisible. (Paris Notebooks 176)

David Lodge equates this desire to be invisible, to be absent from the text, with the move by modernist writers from diegesis (the authorial voice) to mimesis (the imitation of action):

The classic realist text, . . . , was characterized by a balanced and harmonized combination of mimesis and diegesis, reported speech and reporting context,

authorial speech and represented speech. The modern novel evolved through an increasing dominance of mimesis over diegesis. (37)

The move from diegesis to mimesis was part of a conscious effort by modernist authors to remove themselves from the texts.

Impersonality, 'dramatization', 'showing' rather than 'telling', are the cardinal principles of the modernist fictional aesthetic, as variously formulated and practised by James, Conrad, Ford, Woolf and Joyce. This aesthetic required either the suppression or the displacement of diegesis: suppression by the focalization of the narrative through the characters; displacement by the use of surrogate narrators, whose own discourse is stylized or objectified--that is, deprived of the author's authority, made itself an object of interpretation. (Lodge 38)

The move from diegesis to second-order diegesis means that the discourse of the narrator may become, as Lodge points out, subject to interpretation.

"Its Image on the Mirror" is narrated in the first person. The possessive pronoun 'my' in the opening sentence of the novella--"My last sight of the house at Allenton" (57)--indicates to the reader the presence of a first-person narrator. Because the narrative is focalized through the character of Jean Price, the reader sees and hears the action of the story from Jean's perspective. Her choice of words creates the world of the text. Narration in "Its Image on the Mirror" is what Lodge calls "second-order diegesis" (41), diegesis in which a character seems to have authorial authority. However, the irony which is often revealed in the novella, irony which the narrator, Jean, is unaware of, indicates that behind the narrator is the hidden presence of the author. The 'truth' of the text is often suspended somewhere between Jean's narration and the authorial undercutting of Jean's words. D.B. Jewison speaks of the "questionable authority of the narrative presence" (102) in the novella. The lack of narrative authority impedes the progression towards closure in the novella.

The move towards closure, of predictability, towards the world in which everything is familiar, creates the readerly text; however, as Barthes demonstrates in S/Z, even the most closed text can be shown to contain elements of its opposite, the writerly text. As Belsey writes in Critical Practice:

The classic realist text moves inevitably and irreversibly to an end, to the conclusion of an ordered series of events, to the disclosure of what



has been concealed. But even in the realist text certain modes of signification within the discourse-- the symbolic, the codes of reference and the semes-- evade the constraints of the narrative sequence. (105)

Even in the classic realist text, signifiers break away from the move within the text towards closure and 'truth'. These signifiers help to create the writerly text, the text in which the reader must choose among meanings.

The totally writable, plural text does not exist. At the opposite extreme, the readable text is barely plural. The readable text is merchandized to be consumed, while the plural text requires the production of meanings through the identification of its polyphony. (Belsey 105)

No text is ever completely a readerly or a writerly text. On the one hand, "the production of meanings" requires the reader's interpretation; on the other hand, the reader is conditioned to look for fixed meaning, closure, 'truth'.

The search for fixed meaning in a text is conducted within the hermeneutic code. "The hermeneutic code inscribes the desire for closure and 'truth'" (Silverman 257) and "operates in tandem with the semic code to inscribe and re-inscribe a culturally determined position or group of positions to which the reader is expected to conform" (Silverman 262). Within the classic realist text, therefore, the hermeneutic code works to create a readerly text, one in which the reader can recognize the order which the text

establishes. As Barthes and Belsey attest, no text can ever be completely 'closed'. The interesting points in a text are those where the signifiers break free from the tendency towards closure and create new possibilities for meaning. These contradictory movements, the move towards closure and the breaking away from it, constitute the hermeneutic code within a text.

In S/Z, Barthes creates ten divisions of the hermeneutic code. The ten divisions, which Barthes labels morphemes, are thematization, the proposal of the enigma, the formulation of the enigma, the request for an answer, the snare, equivocation, suspended answer, partial answer, jamming, and disclosure. "The first of the hermeneutic morphemes is thematization, or 'an emphasizing of the object which will be the subject of the enigma' (209)" (Silverman 257-258). In the novella "Its Image on the Mirror" there is a dual enigma: the narrator's memories of her sister, Isobel, and of her own past. The first suggestion that there is an unsolved mystery in the life of the narrator, Jean Price, is her observation about her parents' 'dying' house: "Ghosts moved in the deserted rooms, opening drawers, tweaking curtains aside. We never saw the ghosts, but we knew they were there" (59). Jean goes on to say that she cannot explain why there would be ghosts as no-one had died in her parents' house. This disingenuous denial of knowledge is negated by Jean's comments on the next page:

When I visited my parents for a weekend, a ghost  
in my old bedroom watched me watching myself in the  
glass. . . . The ghosts outnumbered the survivors.

Nothing could bring back Frank, my brother, killed in the last war, or Isobel, my sister, married, and in Venezuela, and equally lost. (60)

Obviously, although neither character died in the house (and Isobel is not dead at all, but only 'lost'), their presence 'haunts' both the house and Jean. In addition, there is the ghost in Jean's own room, possibly a 'ghost' of her former self.<sup>3</sup> Neil Besner says that, "[t]hese 'ghosts' are Jean's figurative evocations of the subjects she has suppressed behind her objective mirrors" (32). This suppression of knowledge is one of Jean's trademarks as a narrator, and contributes to the fostering of the hermeneutic code in the novella.

In "Its Image on the Mirror," most of the textual enigma is created as a result of the narrative voice. The first-person narrator, Jean Price, is an unreliable reporter of the events of the story. As Peter Stevens writes in "Perils of Compassion":

Her [Jean's] voice gives the impression of order and control, but scattered throughout the narrative are stray phrases which indicate that she is not as sure of events as the lucid tone suggests, so that one of the deepest ironies of the book may be the discrepancy between Jean's apparent comprehension of those events and her failure to see the reality as it exists. (67)

Stevens's argument is that Jean cannot present the truth because she herself does not perceive it. This view positions Jean as an

unreliable narrator whose presentation of 'reality' is suspect. Janice Kulyk Keefer also sees Jean as an unreliable narrator. Keefer claims that Jean's memory is selective because Jean is "forever pitting her memories/fictions of the past against what her mother's ethos dictates the past was or should have been" (63).

The opening paragraphs of the novella offer the first example of Keefer's argument concerning the dichotomy between Jean's version of the truth and her mother's. "Its Image on the Mirror" opens with a detailed description of Jean Price's last view of her parents' house. Jean compares the sight to a religious painting: "My last sight of the house at Allenton is a tableau of gesticulating people stopped in their tracks, as in those crowded religious paintings that tell a story" (57). The emphasis is upon the idea of frozen time: the scene is a tableau in which people are "stopped in their tracks" (57). Jean then fills in the details of this particular tableau: she and her mother are in a car, "the back of which was filled with sweaters and winter coats" (57); her father, looking "grim and aggrieved" (58) is in another car, an "old Chevrolet" (58); there is a moving van "Across the street" (58); on the sidewalk are "[h]alf a dozen French-Canadian children" (58); a priest in black stands on the lawn; "Mrs. Braddock, the real estate agent, opens the front door for a cleaning woman" (58); "A gardener kneels before a row of stones painting them white" (58). All of these details accumulate to fix the picture in the reader's mind, to create a fully envisioned reality. And then, in the midst of this realistic detail, a jarring note is heard: "We can see, through the trunk of the tree

gone transparent, the statue of St. Therese of Lisieux that will stand in its place very soon" (58). The entire description is suddenly placed in doubt in the reader's mind, a doubt which is confirmed when, in the next section, the narrator states, "[m]y mother says I saw nothing of the kind" (58). The narrator introduces two elements--a jarring note of unreality ("the trunk of the tree gone transparent") and the negation of her view by another character--and through these elements, the entire detailed reconstruction loses narrative authority. If Jean really did see this scene, in all its detail, how could she have seen, through a transparent tree trunk, a statue that is not yet in place? If she did see this scene, why introduce her mother's conflicting view? The narrator presents herself as unreliable, uncertain of the 'true' version of her past.

This process, a careful reconstruction of the past, complete with exact details, followed by a statement of negation, occurs frequently in the story.<sup>4</sup> The narrator, in her quest for the 'truth' about her past, creates and then destroys various versions of the past, returning over and over again to the same subjects. Nine pages after her mother has denied the reality of the tableau, Jean returns again to the subject:

"You people are going to haunt this house," said Mr. Braddock, as the advance guard of new occupants fanned out on the lawn. They were a priest, a gardener with a paintbrush and bucket of white paint, and a boy with a barrow of gravel. . . .

The gardener began painting stones, and the boy

spilled his barrow of gravel on the lawn. He raked the gravel into swirls and scrolls. How long did it take them to kill the grass? (My mother says I did not see this.) (67)

Although Jean claims that she has the 'truth' about her past, she herself calls this 'truth' into question. The reader is constantly left searching for certainty, never sure how far Jean's words can be trusted. This uncertainty prolongs the enigma of the text for the reader. The question of which is the 'true' version of Jean's past is the enigma which the reader attempts to dis-cover; the enigma which Jean is trying to dis-cover concerns her 'enigmatic' sister, Isobel.

Barthes's second division of the hermeneutic code is the proposal of the enigma. The enigma in "Its Image on the Mirror" (for the narrator) centers around Jean's perceptions of her sister, Isobel. The first overt statement which Jean makes about the mystery surrounding Isobel is in the first section of the novella. After describing Isobel's elopement six years earlier, Jean says:

It has so often been in my power to destroy my sister --to destroy, that is, an idea people might have about her--but something has held back my hand. I think it is the instinct that tells me Isobel will betray herself; there will always be the hurt face of her admirer turning slowly to me, as if to tell me, So you were the good one, after all. (64)

The enigma is proposed through Jean's statement that it is in her power "to destroy" her sister; the reader's reaction is to wonder what information Jean has about her sister. Whatever information Jean possesses, it would destroy "an idea people might have about" Isobel. This ambiguous statement is qualified by both the verb "might have"--Jean does not state that people do have a certain idea about Isobel--and the subject of the clause, "people," which is not defined: is Jean speaking of her family, her husband, people in general, the reader? In addition, by the end of the novella, the reader is aware that Jean is one of the "people" (perhaps the only one) who has a certain idea about Isobel. This produces a duality of subject which is present throughout the novella: Jean occupies the dual role of both narrator and character, and as a split narrator she is often unaware of her own motivations and emotions. An example of Jean's uncertainty about her own character is revealed in a further disclosure about both Isobel and the enigma of the text:

Even her [Isobel's] baby face is secretive, although no one would think that except me. . . . I remember that she was evasive and stealthy, and that I used to imagine she knew something she was too careless or indifferent to tell. I believed that one day she would speak, and part of my character hidden from everyone but her would be revealed. She might have spoken but our dialogue was cut short. (67)

The enigma within the text is revealed to be a dual one: both the

characters of Jean and Isobel hold secrets. Jean withholds information from the reader; Isobel withholds information from Jean (or Jean perceives Isobel to be withholding information from her). The duality of the hermeneutic code mirrors the duality of both the semic and symbolic code.<sup>5</sup>

The semic code is closely linked with the hermeneutic code, as the above quotation demonstrates. Jean describes Isobel as "secretive," "evasive," and "stealthy": these signifiers foster the sense of enigma which surrounds Isobel. Jean says that "[i]n those days I had one pursuit, and that was my sister's life. No mystery could have drawn me as much as the mystery of the plain rooms she lived in" (91). Jean's fascination with Isobel's life turns "Its Image on the Mirror" into a form of mystery novel in which Jean's quest for the secret hidden within Isobel's life propels the reader towards a final disclosure. Jean leads the reader to believe that this mystery can finally be solved, for although Isobel distances herself from her sister, there are moments when Jean catches glimpses of Isobel's life. Jean says, "[s]he walled herself away from me. There were gaps through which I could come in; there were times when, shameless, I forced my way" (91). The reader assumes that the enigma of Isobel's life will eventually be solved. Silverman points out that this assumption is typical for the hermeneutic code:

Because the hermeneutic code moves towards disclosure, it, like the semic code, projects a stable subject about whom things can ultimately be discovered



although the process may be painstaking and full of delays--a subject, in short, who can be defined and known. (262)

However, as has been discussed in chapter one, the 'truth' of the semic code in "Its Image on the Mirror" which is ultimately dis-covered is not fixed, but fluid. The 'truth' of the hermeneutic code is equally fluid; the reader's expectation of closure is denied.

The moment at which the subject is dis-covered, which Barthes defines within his hermeneutic code as disclosure, is the moment when the story ends. For example, in a mystery story, once the author reveals the name of the murderer and the method of the murder, the reader loses interest; he/she has discovered the 'truth' of the text and is no longer compelled to read further. The hermeneutic code, therefore, must not only propel the reader towards disclosure; it must also delay the moment of disclosure. As Barthes writes:

the problem is to maintain the enigma in the initial void of its answer; whereas the sentences quicken the story's 'unfolding' and cannot help but move the story along, the hermeneutic code performs an opposite action: it must set up delays (obstacles, stoppages, deviations) in the flow of the discourse; . . . . (75)

In "Its Image on the Mirror," the semic code aids in delaying

the moment of disclosure. Jean's perception of Isobel's secretive nature has already been mentioned as one aspect of the semic code which fosters the mystery created in the hermeneutic code. Jean's desire to know everything about her sister's life is thwarted by her sister's very nature. Jean writes:

Even when we were young I silenced her. She would catch my eye (the hopeful, watching, censor's eye) and become silent, "behaving," as our family called it, and nothing could bring her back except my departure. People said I was a heavy presence for Isobel to support. She was another person when I wasn't there. (85)

It is this other person whom Jean wishes to know, but she can only catch glimpses of the other side of Isobel. For example, one evening Jean meets Isobel and Alex, Isobel's lover, on a Montreal street. While still unaware of Jean's presence, Isobel seems (from Jean's viewpoint) to be a different person: "Isobel's face was a flower. Everything wary and closed, removed and mistrustful had disappeared" (98). Yet the minute Isobel sees Jean, "her face closed" (98). Jean states that "I was [Jean's emphasis] her sister, and that was the barrier. There was between us a wall of family knowledge" (88). This barrier between the two sisters delays the final disclosure of the secrets in Isobel's life, the solving of the mystery.

The function of the hermeneutic code is to reveal that which is hidden within the story; however, once the enigma of a text is

solved, the compulsion to continue reading ends. Therefore, Barthes's divisions of the hermeneutic code contain several devices which serve to prolong the suspense. These include "snares for the reader, partial answers to the questions raised, equivocations" (Belsey 106), "suspended answer[s]" (Silverman 261) and "jamming" (Silverman 261). The "wall of family knowledge" between the two sisters is an example of jamming. As Silverman explains:

Jamming involves an acknowledgment of the apparent failure of the hermeneutic activity, usually because of the exhaustion of all available resources (the death of a key witness, the destruction of vital evidence, someone's stubborn refusal to talk, etc.), and is intended to induce in the reader a frenzy of epistemophilia. (261)

Isobel's secretive nature and her refusal to reveal the 'other person' to Jean is an example of jamming: Isobel refuses 'to talk'. This refusal induces in Jean (not the reader) "a frenzy of epistemophilia." The enigma of the text, for Jean, is the hidden side of her sister's nature, the side Isobel reveals when Jean is not there. That which Jean wishes to dis-cover, the Isobel who is present when Jean is not there, is impossible for Jean to dis-cover, for by her presence she dispels the other side of Isobel.<sup>6</sup> The hermeneutic code is 'jammed'; there appears to be no answer to the enigma of Isobel's nature. The narrative continues, however, and with it both Jean's search for the 'truth' about Isobel and the reader's search for the 'truth' of Jean's past.

Mrs. Duncan is another character who places obstacles on the

hermeneutic path. Jean's mother is a source of information about Isobel; however, Mrs. Duncan both withholds information about Isobel (suspended answers) and misleads Jean and the reader (snares). In the second section of the novella, the Labor Day weekend at the cottage, Jean discovers that her mother has concealed certain facts about Isobel's life in Caracas. Jean learns that Isobel's husband is "maniacally jealous of Isobel" (79) and that Isobel is essentially a prisoner in her own house. Mrs. Duncan has obtained this information from a neighbor and concealed it until she could confirm it herself. This instance is an example of a suspended answer, a piece of information in the hermeneutic puzzle which has been withheld for a time. Jean says that "[t]he most astonishing thing was not the story itself, which I might almost have put together without help, but that my mother had waited two years before telling it" (79). Jean may be surprised by her mother's actions, but the reader, who has been told something of Mrs. Duncan's character, is not. Mrs. Duncan has been described, by Jean, as the type of person who "lived every day of her life as if it were preparation for some kind of crisis" (65). Jean gives one of her most revealing comments about her mother's emotional control when she describes her parents' move from Allenton:

That weekend of packing must have been anguish for her [Mrs. Duncan]. She was leaving the house she had lived in forty-two years, and the town where she had spent her life. She said not a word about it, and expected no embarrassing behaviour from me. (65)

This type of woman would be "proud of Isa for keeping her secrets" (79) and would, in turn, keep secrets herself. The signifiers surrounding the character of Mrs. Duncan (the semic code) contribute to the fostering of the enigma in the hermeneutic code. Jean presents her mother as an emotionally repressed woman who either withholds information from Jean or deliberately misleads her.

An instance in which Mrs. Duncan offers misleading information to Jean occurs in the fourth section of the novella. Mrs. Duncan tells Jean that Jean's husband, Tom, had proposed to Isobel and Isobel had refused him. There are two different reasons given for Isobel's refusal: 1) that she never wished to marry, and 2) that she was in love with another man. As Jean says, "[b]oth versions of what Isobel had to say came from my mother. Perhaps Tom told her one story and Isobel another; perhaps she made the whole thing up" (104). Mrs. Duncan's two versions of the marriage proposal are an example of a snare. A snare is a deception practised on either a character (by another character or by him/herself) or the reader (by the text). As Silverman explains:

The snare can thus involve three sorts of deception, only two of which--those involving either a set of characters or the discourse and the reader--would seem to require a deliberate evasion of the truth. (260)

In this instance, there is a deliberate deception (of one character by another); Mrs. Duncan offers two different scenarios and presumably only one of them is accurate.

Jean is unwilling to confront her husband about which version is true:

I ought to put the two accounts before him and let him take his pick. . . . There are questions I could ask, even now, if I thought I was safe. It was a long time ago, his having wanted Isobel, but the wrong question might still pull down the house. (104)

Jean's fear about the answer she might receive from Tom stops her from discovering which is the true story. Her refusal to uncover the truth is another example of jamming, in which a character either refuses or is unable to pursue the truth. In the above example, the advancement of the hermeneutic code is temporarily stopped because of the semic properties of two characters, Jean and Mrs. Duncan.

Jean, as narrator, also creates snares both for the reader and herself. Jean has already been established as an unreliable narrator and her unreliability is due, in large part, to her own "failure to see the reality as it exists" (Besner 67). The snares she sets for the reader, therefore, are not deliberate lies: Jean frequently deceives only herself when she presents information that is designed to delay the final disclosure of the 'truth'. Jean's detailed memory of her "last sight of the house at Allenton" (57) is one example of a snare which Jean sets for the reader, but which ultimately affects only herself. The unrealistic detail of the "trunk of the tree gone transparent" (58) calls the scene into doubt in the reader's mind; the reader

is unwilling to accept Jean's version of the past. Jean, on the other hand, recounts her version of this event twice, despite her mother's rebuttals. In another example, Jean speaks of an event she may have seen after her brother's death.

One night I saw, or thought I saw, or may have dreamed, that my father sat on the stairs weeping. Our mother stood a few steps below him so that their faces were nearly level. . . . Everything in that scene, which I must have dreamed, spoke of the terror of pity. (147)

Jean's reason for discounting the reality of the scene are detailed in the first chapter. The interesting part of this scene, when analyzing the hermeneutic code, is the number of qualifiers Jean includes. She "thought [she] saw, or may have dreamed" the entire scene; she "must have dreamed" it. The reader, who is aware of Jean's semic qualities (her retreat from emotions, her "terror of pity"), believes that Jean may have seen the scene and denied it; Jean believes (or seems to believe) that she did indeed dream it. Jean's version of reality is suspect, but Jean, despite her equivocations, presents her version as if it was the 'truth' about her past.

Another hermeneutic morpheme which the narrator uses to delay disclosure is "equivocation, [which] combines a snare and a truth; it is a statement which can be understood in two quite different ways" (Silverman 261). An example of equivocation, in which Jean attempts to mislead the reader, is found at the beginning of the fourth section of the novella. Jean says, "I am afraid that I

have given two misleading impressions: one that I was jealous of my sister, the other that I married without love" (100-101). Jean's disclaimer that she was not jealous of Isobel is so patently untrue that the reader automatically discounts it. The previous section of the novella contains several descriptions of Jean's impressions of Isobel's life in Montreal. Jean says that she "warmed her hands at [Isobel's] life" (92). The section ends with Jean's encounter with Isobel and her lover, Alex, on a Montreal street, after which Jean says that she "would have thrown away in a minute" (100) her own status--as the "morally correct" (100) soldier's wife--"for a fragment of their mystery" (100). At the same time, Jean is also not jealous of her sister. When she encounters her sister during the Labor Day weekend, Jean is "so filled with pity for her and her children that the pity [is] a physical pain" (76). Jean believes that she "had succeeded in that [duplicating her parents' lives], and Isa had failed" (77). Just as Jean both loves and hates her sister, she also both envies and pities Isobel. Her statement that she was not jealous of Isobel is an equivocation: true and yet also untrue.

As narrator, Jean has other hermeneutic methods besides snares, equivocations, and jamming which she can use to delay the moment of disclosure. One of the methods she uses involves the proairetic code. Normally, the move towards closure in a text is driven by the proairetic code. This code "determines the sequence of events within a story" (Silverman 262) and, as Silverman writes, it "forms 'the strongest armature of the readerly' (i.e. the classic text)" (262). In the standard linear text, the



proairetic code, which essentially involves the plot structure, moves the story forward in time. The reader can anticipate what would logically happen next and his/her expectations for linearity and disclosure are usually fulfilled. Jean delays disclosure by using a non-linear time structure in her narrative.

In "Its Image on the Mirror" the time sequence is jumbled. The novella opens in what seems to be the narrative present--"on the afternoon of a July day in 1955" (57)--but is soon revealed to be the past. Jean says that "[n]othing remains now in Allenton to remind me of the past. I have been told that a bright aluminum-painted fence surrounds what used to be the lawn" (58). This information moves the narrative present some time beyond July of 1955, although Jean does not specify the date. The story moves forward to the Labor Day weekend, with two flashbacks, one to Isobel's illness and another to the time of her marriage. The Labor Day weekend of 1955 occupies the second section of the novella. Then, in the third section, Jean begins a long reminiscence of her past: she tells of her childhood in Allenton and her life in Montreal during the war (sections three and four); she speaks of her first meeting with her husband (section four); she describes the time of her brother's death and the period of family mourning (sections five to seven). Interspersed with these memories are flash-forwards to the present; for example, after describing Alec Campbell, the man who was Isobel's lover during the war, Jean tells of an interview she had with him. At this point, the reader is given a further clue about the narrative present of the story. Jean says that she had an interview with Alec "[l]ast autumn" (86); the reader assumes that this would be

the autumn of 1954. However, Jean goes on to say, "I know something I could tell him [about Isobell], because I know what she became. I saw her on Labor Day weekend, 1955" (87). The narrative present suddenly shifts forward, into 1956 or later, for Jean would not give the date if she saw Alec in the autumn of 1955. And at the end of the story, there is an indication that Jean is narrating the story from an even later date. Speaking of her husband, Jean says, "[h]is memory is for dates, not feelings; even today he will insist that we last saw Isobel in 1958 and not 1955, as I tell it" (154). D. B. Jewison, in his article "Speaking of Mirrors," mentions "the questionable authority of the narrative presence" (101) in "Its Image on the Mirror" and argues that Jean may even have gone so far as to deliberately alter the dates of events in the story. Jewison's argument has a few flaws;<sup>†</sup> however, there is no arguing with the fact that the narrator is often vague (perhaps deliberately so) about exact dates. The narration is circular rather than linear; Jean circles around one event in her past, gradually drawing closer and closer to the moment of disclosure.

Jean's motive for using non-linear narration is to delay the moment of disclosure. The enigmas in the text are discovered in the final section of the novella. Jean knows at which moment the enigma about Isobel is discovered, but she does not simply tell the reader this information; instead, she circles in time around the moment of disclosure. At the same time, she maintains the reader's interest by dropping hints about this moment. She uses three hermeneutic devices, jamming, suspended answers and partial answers, both to maintain the reader's interest and to delay the

moment of disclosure. In the first section, Jean says of Isobel and the secrets she holds: "[s]he might have spoken, but our dialogue was cut short" (67). After the Labor Day weekend, Jean says, "Isobel was going, and had said nothing to me. She had not spoken at all. There was no limit to the size of the world and we would never find each other in it again" (77). Both statements are examples of jamming, "an acknowledgement of the apparent failure of the hermeneutic activity" (Silverman 261). At this point, the reader might be expected to believe that this enigma (about Isobel) will never be solved. In the next section, however, Jean moves back in time to her childhood and she gives the reader a clue that at one point Isobel did speak. Jean says: "Except once, she [Isobel] never asked anything of me except to be let alone" (86). Jean's comment is a partial answer: the reader learns that Isobel did say something to Jean. It is also a suspended answer. The statement is in the third section of the novella: the reader must wait through another four sections and nearly seventy pages to discover what Isobel asked of Jean. The moment of disclosure is delayed by Jean's narrative tactics.

The tenth division of the hermeneutic code is disclosure: "the moment of closure and the end of signification" (Silverman 262). In "Its Image on the Mirror" the moment of disclosure could be considered to be the point at which Isobel tells Jean that she is pregnant. Jean classifies the moment as a turning point: "[f]rom that moment I stopped being the stranger in the dark street and I moved into the bright rooms of my sister's life. The doors were opened to me" (149). Jean believes that now she will finally find out "what it was to be Isobel, to have Alec, to be

loved" (150). Two pages later, after Isobel has spoken of her love for Alec, Jean thinks:

This had been spoken in the most simple tone. There was no intensity, and no drama in her voice. Nevertheless I had the feeling that I had been listening to something completely astonishing and greatly intimate. I understood as I had just before the automobile crash with Tom the inevitability of dying: I experienced again the pool of saliva under the tongue and the swollen lips. The words I had thought then came back now: That is what it is like. I understood that she had told me something I wanted to know. (151)

From Jean's comments it would seem that the enigma (for Jean) within the text has been solved: Isobel has given Jean the information that Jean wants. At this point, the reader, too, should have been told all she wished to know: the 'truth' about Jean's past.

In the classic realist text, the solving of the enigma within the text re-establishes order, either the system which was disturbed by the conflict or a new system which has developed through the conflict. Kaja Silverman states that the hermeneutic code "operates in tandem with the semic code to inscribe and re-inscribe a culturally determined position or group of positions to which the reader or viewer is expected to conform" (262). Presumably, by the end of "Its Image on the Mirror," Jean should have discovered what she wanted to know about Isobel and the text

should have returned to an established order. This is not the case. The scene described below contains suggestions that, all appearances to the contrary, nothing in Jean's life has been resolved. Jean seems to have been given all the information she wanted and yet she says that "[t]here was a flaw in [Isobel's] story, just as some people said there was a flaw in her face" (152). Jean cannot define exactly what that flaw is. She attempts several descriptions of the scene:

We were sisters, rather alike, in our brother's room, having a midnight talk. Isobel watched me, with the expression one of Suzanne's refugees wore when he was trying to explain in faulty English how things had been at home. Someone who has lost his language wears that look, that despair. Fear, despair: despair is too loud for that quiet night. Remove the word, leave Isobel with cheek on hand, eyes gone yellow in the light of the lamp.

It was plain and simple. She was in trouble and needed me. Pretend I had never circled her life, been the stranger on the street, afraid to meet the eyes of another stranger looking out. 'Afraid' is too loud, too. There remains Isobel, then, cheek on hand, a little tired. I remain bolt upright in bed, hugging my knees. Forget despair, fear. We were very ordinary. (152-153)

Yet these attempts to define the situation are unsuccessful. It

is Jean's language which resembles that of a refugee; she grasps at words which will express the 'truth' of the situation and then is forced to abandon them.

At the end of the novella, Jean still does not know the 'truth' about her situation or Isobel's. From her narrative vantage point she looks back at the scene with Isobel and says "[t]here was no limit to my delusions then. . . . I had no reason then to live in reality, as I have now" (148). Yet there is the question of whether Jean is aware of reality, even in the narrative present. Does Jean truly understand what Isobel is saying in this scene? Isobel says to Jean: "'I don't need an address . . . . I can get that from Suzanne. I don't need advice about drinking gin or taking boiling-hot baths. I need somebody's whole attention'" (152). Jean's response to these words is first of all to offer to have Isobel live with her and then to pretend that Isobel has no-one else to turn to. The reader is uncertain about whether Jean even knows that Isobel may be planning to have an abortion. If Jean does understand this, she certainly would be accepting Isobel's "culturally determined position" (Silverman 262). Yet Jean's comments on the following page suggest that, although she still wants to know everything about Isobel, she views the situation almost as a transaction. Jean says:

[Isobel] 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. (153)

Of course, Isobel does "shut the door": the Labor Day weekend demonstrates the distance between the two sisters. At the end of the novella, Jean's view of her sister is unresolved. Although the narrative present of the story is far removed from the story's actual events, Jean is still reliving and retelling these events. D. B. Jewison refers to Jean's statement that she "must run after [Isobel] into infinity, saying, 'Wait, I am not the person you think at all'" (85). Jewison says:

The work [sic] "infinity" suggests not only that [Jean] thinks she must pursue her sister forever, but also that the pursuit could be culminated only in a realm different from the reality of life as it is actually lived. (108)

Jean is still pursuing the 'truth' which she believes her sister holds. And although she says in the final words of the novella--"We would survive, and waking--because there was no help for it--forget our dreams and return to life" (155)--the reader has the impression that Jean has never really awakened from this dream of the past. The 'truth' about this past is unresolved. The enigmas of the novella have not been resolved: closure has not been established.

In the end, the gaps in the hermeneutic code in "Its Image on the Mirror" are more significant than the disclosures. The years between Isobel's confession to Jean and her marriage are passed over without mention, as is any further reference to Isobel's pregnancy. And there is the final question of whether Jean ever

has or will reveal the information she has about Isobel (or even that this information is indeed about the pregnancy). In the last pages of the novella, just after Jean has heard Isobel's confession, Jean contemplates writing to her husband, Tom, about Isobel's problems. She composes the letter and then says:

If I sent the letter, the strangeness would be in having written, "Poor Isa," but it would be Isobel delivered, Isobel destroyed. The story could wait. It would always be there to tell. I might never tell it, but there is always something in waiting for the final word. One day Isobel might be 'poor Isa' in Tom's eyes. (154)

Did Jean ever send the letter? The implication here is that the "final word" has not yet been given; the story is still in limbo, inconclusive. Nearly one hundred pages earlier, Jean had said "[i]t has so often been in my power to destroy my sister--to destroy, that is, an idea that people might have about her--but something has held back my hand" (64). Jean's hand is still held back. Closure has not occurred; the 'truth' of the hermeneutic code has not been revealed.



## CHAPTER FOUR:

### The cultural code in "The Pegnitz Junction"

#### Introduction

The Pegnitz Junction is a touchstone for the critic: its extremely elaborate embeddings of narratives, along with its evident nonlinear and unfinished development, compel the reader to puzzle out the meaning in a way that Gallant's technique of indirection and understatement in her earlier work do not. (Godard 77)

"The Pegnitz Junction" is Mavis Gallant's most fully realized example of the writerly text: the text in which the reader is actively invited to create multiple meanings. All of the codes in this text carry layers of meaning, meaning which is stranded and never reaches a final, definitive signified. An interesting analogy can be drawn between the absence of authoritative meaning in the text and the incomplete, frequently re-routed journey of the three central characters of "The Pegnitz Junction." Just as Christine, Herbert, and little Bert never reach their destination but instead are stranded at the Pegnitz Junction and, just as they, in the process of not reaching their destination, travel through several non-scenic detours, so too do the signifiers in this text move toward meaning and then branch away, approach graspable signifieds and then veer off and, finally, end inconclusively. The reader is left grasping for the ultimate meaning of this text.

Many literary critics of Gallant's work have struggled with the lack of authoritative meaning in "The Pegnitz Junction." Barbara Godard's quotation, which opens this chapter, captures the writerly element of the text: the reader must "puzzle out the meaning" (Godard 77). Godard, however, does not analyze meaning in "The Pegnitz Junction"; instead, she turns to the earlier stories for her analysis of irony in Gallant's works. Another critic who touches upon the difficulties in understanding meaning in the novella, without further elaboration, is George Woodcock. He calls the novella:

the most experimental of Gallant's works, in which she makes no attempt at that special Gallant realism where the web of memory provides the mental links that make for plausibility. (86)

As Godard points out, Woodcock then "settles into commentary on the importance of memory in the psychological makeup of her characters" (Godard 76), without addressing the construction of meaning in Gallant's works. Ronald Hatch writes that "The Pegnitz Junction (1973) is partially a dream voyage with all the disassociations of the dream state" ("Mavis" 47) but again, he has little else to say about meaning in the novella. Lorna Irvine, in her analysis of "the lost, baffled world of 'The Pegnitz Junction'" (133), proposes that meaning, in both this novella and the Linnet Muir sequence of stories, is organized by "the activity of the female imagination" (133). Irvine writes: "the female artist, by the strength of her imagination, holds

holds together a world attacked by masculine violence (war, repressive political ideologies)" (133). This theory has its attractions; however, it seems a little one-sided, accounting, as it does, for only one-half of the human experience contained within "The Pegnitz Junction" (for example, how does one account for Herbert's pacifist beliefs?) Neil Besner, after a thorough analysis of the "individual and cultural dislocations" (82) enacted within the novella, concludes: "the ending [of "The Pegnitz Junction"] is the most ambiguous, the most open-ended of all in this book [the collection of the same title]" (92). Besner comes closest to acknowledging the writerly nature of the novella. He writes:

More than any other work in Gallant's canon, "The Pegnitz Junction" experiments instructively with mixed modes, with polyphonic narration, with literary parody, caricature, and extended metaphor. (82)

Besner's focus, however, is upon "the linked terms of 'memory, imagination, artifice'" (Godard 77) and on "on the effects of rhetoric rather than its formal analysis" (Godard 77). Balanced against these silences and partial explanations is Gallant's assertion that "The Pegnitz Junction" is "the favorite of all [her] writing" (Hancock 98) because in it she "finally answered [her] own question. Not the historical cause of Fascism--just its small possibilities in people" (Hancock 100). How then does one reconcile the problems faced by the critics (and the reader) with Gallant's view of the work?

An understanding of "The Pegnitz Junction" as a writerly text in which meaning is purposely fluid can help the reader to grasp Gallant's reasons for writing "The Pegnitz Junction." One method of analyzing meaning in a writerly text is to identify its polyphony through the use of Barthes' five codes. In "The Pegnitz Junction," the five codes braid together to form a polyphonic text. To dis-cover the writerly nature of this text, one must attempt to unbraid the codes; however, in "The Pegnitz Junction" all of the codes tie back into the cultural code. The codes interconnect and overlap; as Kaja Silverman says of the cultural code: "Indeed, the semic, proairetic, symbolic, and hermeneutic codes can perhaps be best described as branches of the cultural codes" (277). As a result, a discussion of any one of the codes necessarily leads back to the cultural code. I shall demonstrate with a brief introduction to the symbolic and hermeneutic codes in this text.

In an interview with Geoff Hancock, Mavis Gallant says that The Pegnitz Junction is "not a book about Fascism, but it's certainly a book about where it came from" (83). Gallant's comment touches upon the central antithesis of the symbolic code in the text: the opposition between culture and barbarism. Speaking of her first reaction to pictures taken in German concentration camps, Gallant says:

There was hardly a culture or civilization I would have placed as high as the German. But what the pictures said was that neither culture nor civilization nor art nor Christianity had been a retaining wall. Why not? (Hancock 99)

"The Pegnitz Junction" is part of Gallant's answer to this question.

The posing of a question or an enigma is the area of the hermeneutic code. In "The Pegnitz Junction" Gallant attempts to answer her question; as she says in an interview with Geoff Hancock, she "never lost interest in what happened, the why of it" (100). The 'why' of what happened in Germany prior to and during the Second World War, the 'why' of the atrocities of the concentration camps, is the enigma of the hermeneutic code in "The Pegnitz Junction." Gallant says that she answers the question to her own satisfaction:

I had the feeling that in everyday living I would find the origin of the worm--the worm that had destroyed the structure. The stories in The Pegnitz Junction are, to me, intensely political for that reason. It 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 100)

In "The Pegnitz Junction" the central antithesis of the symbolic code and the enigma posed by the hermeneutic code are intricately connected to the cultural or referential code. Indeed, in any discussion of the symbolic code, the cultural code is an integral element for, as Silverman explains: "The symbolic code is really no more than an extension or subset of

the cultural codes, whose structuring oppositions it articulates" (274). As the enigma of "The Pegnitz Junction" revolves around the opposition between culture and barbarism --the structuring opposition of the symbolic code--the hermeneutic code also becomes a subset of the cultural code. My discussion of culture versus barbarism and the reasons why German culture failed to prevent barbarism necessarily extends to a discussion of German culture itself.

"The Pegnitz Junction" examines the many different areas of knowledge in the cultural code and the ways in which these areas can break down, resulting in a corresponding breakdown of culture. Roland Barthes, in his introductory comments about the cultural code, writes that:

the cultural codes are references to a science or a body of knowledge; in drawing attention to them, we merely indicate the type of knowledge (physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary, historical, etc.) referred to, without going so far as to construct (or reconstruct) the culture they express. (S/Z 20)

Although Barthes does not wish to construct or reconstruct the culture created by the cultural or referential code, in "The Pegnitz Junction," culture, specifically German culture, is constructed and then de-constructed through Gallant's language.<sup>1</sup> The tools of construction--"polyphonic narration" (Besner 82), "intentional symbolism" (Woodcock 86), "extended metaphor"

(Besner 82), irony, parody, self-reflexivity, intertextuality --are all applied to the different areas of received knowledge which comprise the cultural code. Barthes lists some of these as "a History of Literature . . . a History of Art . . . a History of Europe . . . a Treatise on Psychology . . . an Ethics . . ." (Barthes, S/Z 205-206).<sup>2</sup> Through an analysis of these different areas and the way in which the accepted knowledge of these areas "turns culture into nature, [and] appear[s] to establish reality, 'Life'" (Barthes, S/Z 206), one has access to the cultural code through which Gallant simultaneously constructs and de-constructs German culture in "The Pegnitz Junction."

The construction of the cultural code contributes to the writerly nature of "The Pegnitz Junction." Gallant offers no fixed viewpoint on German culture; instead, she throws together a pastiche of conflicting ideas, viewpoints, voices. The story itself is told from the narrative viewpoint of Christine, a young German woman. She is taking a journey by train from Paris back to Germany with her lover, Herbert, and his son, little Bert. The train carries them swiftly to Strasbourg, but from that point their journey is interrupted, delayed, re-routed, and finally ended, inconclusively, at the Pegnitz Junction. During the train ride, Christine receives information from other passengers. This information comes to Christine psychically; Lorna Irvine calls her "a conductor" (134). In Mavis Gallant's words, Christine is hearing other people thinking.<sup>3</sup> Christine thinks of the information she receives in the following way:

Christine thought she knew what "information" truly was, and had known for some time. She could see it plainly, in fact; it consisted of fine silver crystals forming a pattern, dancing, separating, dissolving in a glitterly trail along the window. (23)<sup>4</sup>

The information which Christine receives, along with Christine's own perceptions, make up "The Pegnitz Junction."

The different voices and stories which Christine hears give the text a layered quality; George Woodcock writes that "this technique give[s] a dramatic quality to the novella, since it becomes so largely a pattern of voices heard in the mind's ear" (87). This pattern of voices, each with its own distinctive tone and viewpoint, creates the multi-layered meaning of the text. No one voice comments on another, although Christine does provide commentary on the actions she sees around her. No one voice gives an authoritative version of events. The reader must construct her own meaning from the collage of voices.

Gallant's use of language gives the reader several different levels of meaning. As Belsey writes: "[I]t is language itself which, by differentiating between concepts, offers the possibility of meaning" (59). A more restrictive view of language is offered in "The Old Friends," one of the collected stories in The Pegnitz Junction. Gallant says of a character, a police commissioner, that "He is like any policeman; he knows one meaning for every word" (90). Contrast this understanding of language with the story which Christine attempts to tell to little Bert at different points in the narrative. This story,



like all of the stories told to little Bert, revolves around a large sponge which the child has adopted and named Bruno. Little Bert has asked for a story about Bruno's family. Christine opens her own book (which, significantly, is a paperback of Bonhoeffer's essays)<sup>5</sup> and reads:

"'Bruno had five brothers. All five were named Georg. But Georg was pronounced five different ways in the family, so there was no mistake. They were called the Yursh, the Shorsh, the Goysh . . .'" (53).

At this point, Herbert interrupts, calling the story silly and confusing. Yet Christine's story provides both a motif for the text and an understanding of the way in which writerly language works. Meaning depends on interpretation; words do not have one meaning but several. In a writerly text, such as "The Pegnitz Junction," the reader must choose between meanings, never sure of which pronunciation of Georg is correct: Yursh, Shorsh, Goysh, etc.

"The Pegnitz Junction" is Gallant's most fully-realized example of the postmodern text. The central elements of the cultural codes--"a History of Literature . . . a History of Art. . . a History of Europe . . . a Treatise on Psychology . . . an Ethics . . ." (204-205)--provide an ideal division for the examination of how the cultural code contributes to the writerly quality of "The Pegnitz Junction."

Literary references, of the English and German traditions, are central to "The Pegnitz Junction." Geoff Hancock states that "much of 'The Pegnitz Junction' is a parody of Brecht, Kafka, and Thomas Mann'" ("Mavis" 6). Hancock does not offer any support for this statement and the reader can only assume that this information was obtained directly from Ms. Gallant during Hancock's visit with her in Paris. Another critic who comments on the literary references and parodies in "The Pegnitz Junction" without substantiating his remarks is Ronald Hatch:

The novel also abounds in half-submerged references to German history and literature. At various points we meet Kafka's Castle, Wilhelm Busch's Julchen Knopf, refugees from behind the wall and commandos disguised as children. ("Mavis" 67)

Grazia Merler states that "[all] of these interferences are presented as parodies of popular literature--in short, they have the make-up of television serial programs" (Merler 58), but she does not mention which serial programs she has in mind. Neil Besner mentions "literary parody" (82) in his list of the experimental techniques which Gallant uses in this text, but he too does not offer any specific examples or quotations. These parodies contribute to the literary field of knowledge in the cultural code; however, the critics, for the most part, have simply mentioned them without any further analysis.

Part of the reason why the German references have been mentioned only in passing is that, for the English-speaking reader, the German references are only accessible through secondary sources; they are not part of the cultural focus which the reader brings to the work. This code can be accessed only through references to German literature and through literary criticism by scholars familiar with German literature. Perhaps for this reason "The Pegnitz Junction" and the other German stories in the volume by the same name have been more popularly received in Europe than in North America.<sup>6</sup> To understand a parody, one must be familiar with the original, the work which is being parodied. For the North American reader, many of the originals are unfamiliar; the references to "the body of knowledge" (Barthes, S/Z 20) presumably shared by the reader fall upon deaf ears. Therefore, after a brief discussion of the significance of two German texts, Franz Kafka's The Castle and Thomas Mann's Death in Venice,<sup>7</sup> to "The Pegnitz Junction," I will focus my examination of the literary references in the cultural code on the novella's most important subtext: the old woman's monologue.

One reference to German literature which may be familiar to English speakers is the subtext of the journey to the castle, a reference to Kafka's The Castle. Janice Kulyk Keefer explains that in the story of the family excursion (pages 27-34), "we have a pastiche of Kafka, as Christine looks absently out the train window to observe a family party climbing a hill to what they have been assured is a museum-castle" (175). Gallant herself, in an interview with Barbara Gabriel, says that in the

novella, "There's the castle of Kafka, but it's turned into a museum" (24). The parody of Kafka re-emphasizes the central literary and Christian metaphor of "The Pegnitz Junction": the journey in which the final destination is never reached. In The Castle, the quest is for a metaphorically Christian destination; in "The Pegnitz Junction", despite the many Christian references, the final destination is a secular one.<sup>8</sup>

Gallant, in her interview with Geoff Hancock, mentions that she "would have written Death in Venice but an elderly German gent got there first" (Hancock 125). Death in Venice is the story of an artist, Gustave von Aschenbach, and his obsession with a young boy. A possible parody exists between Aschenbach's fascination with Tadzio and Herbert's complete absorption in his own son. Gallant writes that Herbert's "deepest feelings were linked to [his] child" (5): this seems the natural relationship between parent and child and yet Gallant's frequent references to Herbert's attachment to his son foreground the relationship for the reader. The parody highlights the change from an artistic to a materialistic focus in Germany since the Second World War: Herbert, the sensible engineer, and his whining son are contrasted with Aschenbach, a writer at the height of his powers, and the young boy, "Tadzio, the occasion of Aschenbach's degradation, [whol] is also, as an incorporation of the symbol of Saint Sebastian, an incarnation of his art" (Hatfield 63).

Two other instances in which Herbert is besotted with children contribute to the parody of Aschenbach's infatuation with Tadzio. When a group of little girls, described as "a commando" (20), takes over the railway carriage, Herbert notices

the leader, a "bossy little blonde of about eleven" (*ibid.*). Herbert asks for his briefcase, which the little girl gives to him. "She smiled adoringly. He appraised her as though she were twenty" (21). In a second instance, Herbert notices a child, Julchen Knopp, who is in a car at a railway crossing. The train stops for several minutes, but "[p]unctilious Herbert was far too besotted with Julchen Knopp to notice or protest" (42). In both instances, the object of adoration is not a symbol of art or Platonic beauty, but of authoritarianism and/or decline. The leader of the "commnado" is described as both a thief and a gangster. Julchen Knopp is a "fair, rosy, curly, simpering, stupid-looking child" (41-42). These two young children are the next generation, of whom Gallant writes, "What she [Christine] had just seen now was the decline of the next generation. . . . There was no limit to mediocrity" (42).

A Feminist Sub-text: An Old Woman's Monologue

The structuring forces of the English literary tradition are more readily apparent to the English-speaking reader. The metaphor of life as a journey has been mentioned and will be discussed more fully in the section on the ethical element of the cultural code. Another more recent literary tradition is the world of 'women's fiction,' which is best exemplified by the food monologue of the old woman who shares a compartment with Christine, Herbert and little Bert. Lorna Irvine, in her chapter in Sub/Version on Gallant's fiction, says that the old woman's monologue

demonstrates the uncelebrated nurturing and perseverance that constitute many silent female lives. As a subtext, it is a dramatic example of women's conventional and unacknowledged space. (137)

The old woman's monologue, in an ordinary story-line, would be unacknowledged, for it is 'overheard' or telepathically picked up by Christine. Both the substance of the woman's monologue, which is initially a recitation of meals she made in America, and the indirect method in which it is presented to the reader, conform to Lorna Irvine's view of life seen "in a peculiarly female way" (Irvine 138). The monologue, however, has more layers of meaning than a simple comment on "women's conventional and unacknowledged space."

Christine thinks of the "information" she picks up from

the old woman as "fine silver crystals forming a pattern, dancing, separating, dissolving in a glittering trail along the window. . . . It was from the woman that the silvery crystals took their substance; she was the source" (23). The old woman is an immigrant who moved from Germany to the United States prior to World War II: "Two first cousins from Muggendorf married two first cousins from Doos. Emigrated to the USA, all four together" (23). The old woman is the one who makes the evening meal for two families: her own, and her double cousins. She cooks "around seventeen thousand suppers, all told" (24). As a German citizen who lived in the United States during the war, the old woman offers a unique opportunity for Gallant's re-writing of German culture. The old woman's recitations of the meals she prepared and her thoughts on her relatives, American life, and 'outsiders' offer the reader several different points of entry into the lives of people who lived out World War II "safe in their houses" (Keefer 171).

Her name is Frau Josef Schneider, which is, in itself, a parody: Josef (Joseph), the father of Christ, is combined with Schneider, the name of a major American meat-packing firm. The food which she serves reflects the changing cultural status of the four German cousins. When they first arrive in Elmhurst, Frau Schneider makes traditional German meals:

fresh chicken soup, pea soup with bacon, my own goulash soup, hot beer soup, . . . prepared my own cabbage in brine, made fresh celery salad, potato salad our way, potato dumplings, duck with red cabbage, . . . apple

dumplings, roast knuckle of pork, kidneys in vinegar sauce, cherry compote our way, . . . . (24)

The repetition of the phrases "my own" and "our way" demonstrates the distance Frau Schneider places between herself and the country she lives in. Later, the other cousins and their daughter, Carol Ann, begin demanding American-style food. "They wanted Aunt Jemima pancakes, corn syrup, maple syrup, hot onion rolls, thousand-island dressing . . ." (35). Again, there is the emphasis on the difference between Frau Schneider's cooking and the 'American way': "They wanted just soup for supper, with cold ham and iceberg lettuce, dressing their way [my emphasis]" (37). During the Depression, the cousins eat "beans, sardines, peanut butter, macaroni. You could get lambs' kidneys for twenty cents, nobody in the U.S. ate them" (38). Here again, the monologue emphasizes the differences between American and German palates. The food monologue reflects more than "a culinary history of the United States" (Irvine 138); it demonstrates Frau Schneider's alienation from the society in which she lives.

The Germans' refusal to take American citizenship also reflects their lack of assimilation. The old woman thinks: "We never took the citizenship so we never voted. Were never interested in voting" (39). During the war, the cousins are registered as enemy aliens and are restricted to certain areas. Frau Schneider's reaction to these restrictions is to think: "The thing was we never wanted to go anywhere except the three blocks between our two homes. . . . The joke was on the whole



USA!" (48). Frau Schneider's alienation from the country she lives in is reflected in her comments.

Frau Schneider sees the world in an 'us versus them' mentality. She believes that among the four cousins there was "[n]ever a disagreement. Never an angry word. Nothing but good food and family loyalty" (24), but her own thoughts betray this belief. Carol Ann, her niece, is referred to as "the little bitch" (34) and "the little cow"; Carol Ann's mother is "the big cow" (34). The old woman's mis-remembering of the past is symptomatic of Gallant's characters. In "The Pegnitz Junction," the reader must always be on guard for characters who mis-remember the past or who "do not remember what they have done, but only what has been done to them" (Boyce 31). As Karen Smythe writes in her discussion of the novella:

Gallant positions the reader at the crossroads of memory and history; we become cultural critics, responsible for reading history as accurately as possible and for condemning misinterpretations. (90)

The reader must look through the layers of meaning in Frau Schneider's monologue to discover the possible 'truths' which Frau Schneider reveals.

One of these 'truths' is that, although Frau Schneider is both a nurturer, as Lorna Irvine views her, and a victim, as a registered enemy alien in the United States, she is also a racist and a bigot. Frau Schneider's thoughts reveal her racial and religious prejudices. Her prejudices move from her own

neighborhood--"The other couple bought a car when the neighborhood went. . . . Before the blacks came we had the Catholics. That was the way it went" (50)--to the President of the United States, who she believes was a "Dutch Jew" (39) whose "real name was Roszenfeldt" (39). Her monologue reveals her complicity in the events of the past. At one point, her thoughts go back to World War II:

There was a plan to save some German cities, those with interesting old monuments. The plan was to put Jews in the attics of all the houses. The Allies would never have dropped a bomb. What a difference it might have made. Later, we learned that the plan was sabotaged by the President of the USA. Too bad. It could have saved many famous old statues and quite a few lives. (53-54)

As Keefer writes: "It need hardly be mentioned that Frau Schneider is not here concerned with Jewish lives" (174). Frau Schneider's destructive and racist tendencies add another layer of meaning to her monologue.

Critics have interpreted Frau Schneider's monologue in several different ways. Lorna Irvine views the monologue as an expression of "the uncelebrated nurturing and perseverance that constitute many silent female lives" (137). Irvine sees nurturance as an exclusively female domain: she points out that during the war, Frau Schneider prepares food while the two male cousins work in a factory which has been converted to make

submarines. Irvine writes: "Nurturance and destruction are paired, and the old woman's concentrated remembrance of past meals assumes metaphoric relevance" (138). However, the old woman's monologue also reveals destructive tendencies. Contrast Irvine's analysis of the monologue with Keefer's indirect indictment of Frau Schneider's anti-Semitism. Other critics view the monologue as a comment on the absurd. Barbara Gabriel, in an interview with Gallant, comments that "[t]he old lady who eats all the time is a kind of grotesque out of Gunter Grass" (24); Neil Besner describes the monologue as a comical tale, a "never-ending list of the food she [Frau Schneider] cooked" (89). So which interpretation is correct? Is Frau Joseph Schneider's monologue a parody of a type of 'woman's fiction' or is it an accurate representation of woman's "conventional and unacknowledged space" (Irvine 137)? Are Frau Schneider's memories metaphors for her life (and other lives) in the United States or are they "banal" and therefore restricted to a limited meaning? Does Frau Schneider's information provide a window of interpretation into fascism's "small possibilities in people" (Hancock 100)? The implied author does not direct the reader towards one accepted reading; the monologue remains open to several different interpretations. In this subtext, as in the novella as a whole, "Gallant requires the reader to decipher the 'junction' of history and fiction, the past and the present as posited by the text" (Smythe 90).

[I]t seemed to him now that some of the letters in today's paper might have been written a good fifty years in the past. This time he was accused not just of taking the public for dimwits, but also of sapping morals and contributing to the artistic decline of the race. (64)

The quotation above introduces a section of "The Pegnitz Junction" which is devoted to reconstructing ideas about German art and 'high' culture. Gallant introduces two different groups: a museum curator, who is embroiled in a controversy surrounding an exhibition of photographs, and the photographer who took the pictures; and "an opera party" (68), escorted by their cultural leader. In both cases, Gallant presents several myths about culture (specifically German culture) and then either parodies, denies, or in some other way reconstructs these myths. One myth which Gallant examines is the idea that culture and barbarism cannot co-exist simultaneously. Another is the concept of art and the artist as purveyors of "truth"; an associated myth is the concept of the proper artistic subject. Finally, Gallant questions the current disrepute of German culture. All of these myths are reconstructed to show that the reality they supposedly represent is questionable: not established 'truth' but something more fluid. And then there is always the tag note, the famous Gallant ambiguity, which leaves the reader uncertain of how to read these reconstructions.

The controversy which the curator is embroiled in revolves

around a photography exhibit which he has commissioned. The exhibit has been attacked in the local papers and the curator is pictured composing an answer to an editorial. This action mirrors Herbert's imagined letters of protest;<sup>9</sup> again, the characters are portrayed as unwilling to engage in direct action, although the curator, like Herbert, seems to thrive on these controversies: he (the curator) "secretly felt that his job depended to some extent upon the frequency and stridency of the attacks" (64). The defence of art, which is usually justified as a defence of 'truth', becomes an end in itself.

Oddly enough, in a description of the curator, Gallant evokes the image of a fascist. As the curator composes his letter of protest, he paces back and forth on the platform, "the newspaper tucked high under one arm" (65). The image recalls pictures of the Fuhrer, pacing, his baton high under one arm. The curator is later described as only willing "to defend art as far as the first row of barbed wire" (66-67). When the photographer arrives, the curator is described as "sick to death of art and artists" (68). The curator becomes a parody of the defender of art against "Philistine aggression" (64).

The photographer, too, is a parody of the 'true' artist. He is dressed in a hodge-podge of international clothing (66), wears false teeth which make him look older than his years, and has a young wife who makes fun of him to her mother.<sup>10</sup> All of these humorous details lessen the reader's respect for him and call into question his stature as an artist. The photographer is presented as an innocent: he has "nothing in the way of a social theory" (67) and in television interviews, "he could only

bleat that he loved his wife and thought marriage was noble and fulfilling" (67). The verb "bleat" marks the photographer as an innocent, and indeed, as an innocent he is a target for abuse, a lamb for the slaughter. Although the photographer says "nothing but simple and gentle things" (67), the public wants to lynch him. The comment that the photographer does not have a social theory is telling; the words "social theory" recall for the reader the social theories which the Nazis derived from the writing of Nietzsche. The photographer, who has no social theory, is a parody of an artist; the statement about his detractors offers a commentary on those who have the belief that an artist should have a social theory.

The photographs themselves are an example of the reconstruction of myth. The photographer has "reproduced every inch of a model he said was his wife" (64), but the resulting photographs are so abstract that "most adults honestly did not know what the pictures were about" (64). Only children, with their "instinctive innocence" (64) can identify the subject. The subject itself parodies the idea of an artistic subject which provides inspiration and truth to the audience. Gerald Graff, in his chapter entitled "The Myth of the Postmodern Breakthrough," quotes Ortega y Gasset's reasons for the significance given to art in the nineteenth century:

Art was important for two reasons: on account of its subjects which dealt with the profoundest problems of humanity, and on account of its own significance as a human pursuit from which the species derived its justification and dignity. (Graff 34)

Abstract photographs of "every inch of a model" can hardly fall under the definition of a subject which deals with "the profoundest problems of humanity."

The concept of art as "a human pursuit from which the species derived justification and dignity" is also examined in this section. The local paper interpreted the photographs as an insult to German womanhood; the curator, in his imagined letter, responds with a comment about "[t]he myth of German womanhood, a myth belied every day . . ." (65). The myth (presumably concerning the purity of German womanhood) is part of a larger cultural myth, one with the curator has supposedly attacked through this exhibit. This larger myth links morals with the artistic standards of a given race: the curator is accused of "sapping morals and contributing to the artistic decline of the race" (64). Art is seen as one of the bulwarks of racial superiority: an idea which Gallant challenges through her depiction of both curator and photographer and the attacks against them.

The concept of culture (with art as a subset of culture) as a defense against declining morals is a theme which Gallant repeatedly turns to in her reconstruction of German culture in "The Pegnitz Junction." As Ronald Hatch writes: "For Gallant, the major question was how a culture as rich and brilliant as Germany's could fall to such depths" ("Mavis" 9). Culture was proven to be no bulwark against barbarism: one reason for this failure could be that, despite the prevailing beliefs of Western civilization, art (as one representation of culture) never was a defense.<sup>11</sup> Gerald Graff's analysis of the differing purposes of

art, as defined by modernist and postmodernist writers and critics is useful here. Graff lists several postmodern writers and literary critics who "[call] into question the traditional claims of literature and art to truth and human value" (32).

What is taking place, these critics suggest, is the death of our traditional Western concept of art and literature, a concept which defined "high culture" as our most valuable repository of moral and spiritual wisdom. . . . George Steiner draws attention to the disturbing implications of the fact that, in the Nazi regime, dedication to the highest 'humanistic' interests was compatible with the acceptance of systematic murder. (31)

Culture, as the new theorists propose, is no defence against barbarism. Gallant continues the challenge against the myth that cultural excellence could not exist simultaneously with "systematic murder" in the section about the opera party.

The second cultural group is a party of people "all in their sixties or so" (68) on their way to the opera. This group is disturbed by the curator's tirade against the photographer; however, "their own cultural group leader, [is] a match for the curator any day" (68). This cultural leader soothes his group with a recitation of cultural names.

He mentioned / Bach / Brahms / Mozart / Mahler / Wagner  
/ Schubert / Goethe / Schiller / Luther and Luther's



bible / Kant / Hegel / the Mann brothers, Thomas and Heinrich; . . ./ Brecht--yes Brecht / several Strausses / Schopenhauer / Gropius / and went on until he had mentioned perhaps one hundred familiar names. (69)

This list of important German cultural figures emphasizes the overwhelming contributions of Germans to a universally-accepted concept of culture. Then, just as the group "was beginning to feel pleasantly lulled" (69), the leader says "[t]he Adolf-time. . .'" (70). The group immediately grows uncomfortable; Christine can hear some of people thinking "'Oh God, where is this kind of talk taking us?'" (70). The leader finishes his sentence by saying "'. . . was a sad time for art in this country'" (70).

What follows is a refutation of the idea that "high culture" cannot exist side-by-side with atrocities. The cultural group's first reaction to the leader's comment is collectively to think: "Who could disagree? Certainly no cultivated person on his way to the opera" (70). The moral decline of the "Adolf-time" is associated with a decline in artistic standards. Yet some of the group's thoughts move beyond this accepted link; they realize that art had coexisted with Nazism.

"But stop! What does he mean when he says 'art.' For isn't music art too?" There had been concerts, hadn't there? . . . There must have been architecture, sculpture, historical memoirs, bookbinding, splendid color films. Plays, ballet--all that went on. (70)

In the end, the group cannot reconcile the two ideas: the existence of culture and the atrocities of the "Adolf-time." They choose to re-interpret the words: "Surely the cultural leader must have meant that it was a sad time in general, especially towards the end" (70). The reader is not allowed the same interpretation. Smythe writes that Gallant's readers must be "cultural critics, responsible for reading history as accurately as possible and for condemning misinterpretations (90). The reader must be able to hold the two contradictory (to minds raised on the common misconceptions of Western culture) ideas in his/her mind: culture and barbarism existing simultaneously.

A final myth which Gallant reconstructs occurs in the section following the analysis of the opera party. A young woman, whom Christine assumes to be an American army wife, goes over to a newstand and purchases "Time, Life and Newsweek" (71). The Norwegian uses this action as an opportunity to criticize American culture.

"They take their culture with them," said the Norwegian. "And what a culture it has become. Drugs, madness, sadism, poverty, lice, syphilis, and several other diseases believed to have died out in the Middle Ages."

"The girl is German," said Herbert smiling. (71-72)

The girl is later revealed to be German and, furthermore, a German who is ashamed of being thought German by others. For

the "American army wife" (71), American culture which, ironically, is linked with several diseases, is preferable to German culture. The decline of culture is complete. Culture is no longer a bulwark against moral decline; it is itself associated with decline. Yet even a culture as morally decadent as American culture (as viewed by the Norwegian) is still preferable, for some of Gallant's characters, to German culture. Gallant's ironic presentation of the two cultures, American and German, calls into question the disrepute of German culture, both during "the Adolf-time" and in the current time of the novella.

Through her reconstruction of art, within the cultural code, Gallant is calling into question several assumptions about German culture. One myth which she examines is that "high culture" (art, literature, music, etc.) is necessarily linked to cultural morals. Culture itself is no bulwark against barbarism; the symbolic oppositions can exist simultaneously. A second reconstructed myth is the idea that artists and their curators are the purveyors and defenders of artistic 'truth'. The curator and the photographer offer a parody of this relationship: the curator, who should be defender of art and artists, is "sick to death" (68) of both and the photographer is a ridiculous innocent with "nothing in the way of a social theory" (67). The opera party leader is also presented as a less-than-ideal defender of art. The reader's last picture of the leader is at the Pegnitz Junction, where he has lost his glasses (a metaphoric equivalent of his sight) and his authority: "Their leader had lost his spectacles . . . His

eyes were small and blue and he looked insane" (78). A third reconstruction concerns the traditional view of the artistic subject as something which "dealt with the profoundest problems of humanity" (Graff 34): the photographer's pictures of his wife, (ironically entitled "Marriage") cannot be said to fall within Graff's definition. Finally, Gallant reconstructs accepted beliefs about German culture: through her creation of the "American army wife" who prefers American culture and all its associated ills to German culture, Gallant questions current beliefs about German culture. The assumptions surrounding the question of the "artistic decline of the race" (64), which the curator challenges in his imagined letter to the papers, are reconstructed in Gallant's examination of the role and purpose of art within a culture.

History pervades "The Pegnitz Junction." Many critics have focused upon Mavis Gallant's treatment of history within her texts. Janice Kulyk Keefer writes that:

It is no exaggeration to assert that Gallant's work is permeated by her engagement with history, her commitment to the imaginative exploration of the meaning of historical events, and her perception of history as lived experience. (162)

A knowledge of European history, particularly twentieth-century European history, is essential for an understanding of the cultural code of "The Pegnitz Junction." E.D. Blodgett mentions "the predominance of the Second World War as a presence, explicit or not, in her work" (3). Lorna Irvine says that, "[t]he effects of World War Two dramatically permeate the lives of the people in 'The Pegnitz Junction'" (134). The events of the past may "permeate" the lives of the characters, but only in an indirect way, for history in "The Pegnitz Junction" is something to be ignored. A character such as Herbert wishes to forget the past and to protect the younger generation (little Bert) from its effects; Christine, who is compared to her home which is "as pink and golden as a pretty child and as new as morning" (3), represents the new Germany, in which "all that was worthwhile keeping had been rebuilt" (3). Despite this aversion to the past, there is a "continual emergence, in memory and in

other, more tangible forms, of reminders of the war" (Besner 84). As Keefer writes: Mavis Gallant "uses recent European history as a kind of filter through whose abrasive metal strands daily life and personal experience are painfully sifted" (163).<sup>12</sup>

The historical element of the cultural code in "The Pegnitz Junction" primarily refers to the Second World War. Knowledge of this war and more generally "the Adolf-time" (70), as one character refers to it, are the cultural references which the reader is expected to share; however, Gallant's treatment of the references to this time is ambiguous, indeterminate. The reader must decide for herself which of fascism's "small possibilities in people" (Hancock 100) qualify, for they are not marked out for the reader; there is no authoritative voice which defines right from wrong, innocent from guilty.

The narrative follows Christine, Herbert, and little Bert on their journey and then leaves them stranded at the Pegnitz Junction, waiting for a train to their final destination. Of course, the term 'final destination' suggests the train rides which took place on the same landscape nearly thirty years earlier. The characters' journey, in some ways, mirrors the one taken by Jews and other 'undesirables'; Janice Kulyk Keefer calls it "an extended inverted parody . . . an ironic mimesis of the trip to 'Pichipoi'" (173). (Keefer explains that 'Pichipoi' "was the word invented by the Jewish children of occupied Paris for the unknown destination to which they were being deported" (170).) Christine even thinks at one point that "the trains sounded sad, as though they were used to ferry poor and weary

passengers--refugees perhaps" (15). On the journey to the Pegnitz Junction, there are no facilities on the train after France; the heat is stifling, yet the passengers are told to keep the windows closed; the train is constantly re-routed and stops frequently: "The train stopped more and more erratically, sometimes every eight or nine minutes" (35). At Strasbourg, Christine gets off the train to have a shower at the station; the facilities are described as "cold as a cellar; no sun, no natural light had ever touched the high walls" (15). The reader can draw implicit parallels in this description with the 'showers' in which the concentration camp victims were gassed. As an ironic tag, Gallant has Christine think, "If this is something you pay for, what are their jails like?" (15). The parallels in the two journeys are never explicitly pointed out for the reader; the reader herself must make the connections.<sup>13</sup>

The journey in "The Pegnitz Junction" shows other similarities to the journey to 'Pichipoi'. "The Pegnitz Junction bears witness to the breakdown in personal responsibility leading to social breakdown" (Hatch, "Creation" 66). The question of responsibility haunts the characters in "The Pegnitz Junction." Herbert plans to write a letter of complaint about the train service:

His planned letter mentioned high-handedness, lives disrupted without thought or care, blind obedience to obsolete orders, pig-headed officials, buck-passing, locked toilets, shortage of drinking water, absence of someone responsible, danger to health, indifference to

others. Among the victims he mentioned a small child, an old woman, a visiting foreigner who would be left with a poor impression, a pregnant American, and a tall girl who wore nothing but size-eleven sandals and a short linen frock, who was travelling almost naked, in fact. (55)

The complaints which Herbert plans to mention in his letter include at least three repetitions of one problem: "blind obedience to obsolete orders," "buck-passing" and "absence of someone responsible." The unwillingness to take responsibility for one's actions shows the possibilities of fascism which allowed for the existence of the concentration camps.

The Germans who 'did not know', or rather, who constructed fictions of ignorance about the existence of death camps, were also caught up in the violence of progress: unlike Benjamin's angel, most of them kept their eyes tightly shut against the pile of human debris past which Nazism whirled them. (Keefer 158)

The central irony of the use of this cultural code is that the main characters mimicking the journey of the past are in this case German; in addition, the two characters who were alive during the Second World War both exhibit signs of the cultural superiority and, in the case of the German woman from the States, anti-Semitism, which are seen as a primary causes of the Holocaust.

References to the Holocaust recreate the historical past



which is the structuring force for the story; the past is constantly re-evoked by Gallant through her use of certain words, images and cultural references. Certain words have enormous powers of reverberation within the reader's mind, setting off chains of images all of which carry emotional baggage. 'Holocaust' is one of these words. Christine uses the word when she looks out the window and searches for the bush fires which have supposedly been set beside the tracks. "Each time the train approached a curve she imagined the holocaust they might become" (36). The word is appropriate for its literal meaning is a thorough destruction, especially by fire. However, the cultural implications of the word, and its specific meaning for the reader, i.e. the destruction of the Jewish people and other 'undesirables' by the German government prior to and during World War II, make the word a 'loaded' one. It is loaded with excess meaning. Gallant specifically refers to the word's other meaning with this description in the paragraph following Christine's thought. "It was true that there were no signs of trouble except for burned-out patches of grass. Not even a trace of ash remained on the sky, not even a cinder" (36). Ash could have been left by the bush fire, but the word also evokes the ash and smoke that hung above the crematoriums. Of this ash, "not even a trace" remains. Any trace of the past is gone.

In "The Pegnitz Junction," the historical past has been built over and deliberately forgotten. The central character, Christine, is from "a small bombed baroque German city, where all that was worthwhile keeping had been rebuilt and which now

looked pink and golden as a pretty child and as new as morning" (3). She, like the city she is from, is pretty and new, a product of the new Germany. She and little Bert were both born after the war. The past for them is ancient history. Gallant emphasizes this point with her mention of a bronze plaque that the travellers see at the train station in France. "The plaque commemorated a time of ancient misery, so ancient that two of the three travellers had not been born then, and Herbert, the eldest, had been about the age of little Bert" (11). The plaque commemorates an event from the Second World War, quite possibly the deportation of foreign Jews from French soil.<sup>14</sup> Despite the fact that little Bert can barely read, Herbert turns the child's head away from the plaque. Neil Besner points out that "[f]rom the beginning, Herbert tries to shield Little Bert from history" (85). The past is something to be avoided.

Herbert, who was a child during the Second World War, does have memories of the past. His mother was put in a concentration camp for religious beliefs; his "distinguished officer father had performed his duty, nothing worse" (47). Herbert avoids the past by forgetting about it. His father is mentioned only once and any reference to his mother makes him uncomfortable. His mother's "life and death gave [Herbert] such mixed feelings, made him so sad and uncomfortable, that he would say nothing except 'Oh, a Christian sermon?' when something reminded him of it" (14). Herbert, who wishes to forget the distant past, also loses track of the immediate past. He disregards his own words to Christine. "He often said he

thought he could not live without her, but a few minutes after making such a declaration he seemed unable to remember what he had just said" (4). At one point, Herbert takes Christine into an empty compartment and tries to get her to agree to have sex.

Suddenly Herbert begged her to marry him--tomorrow, today. He would put little Bert in a 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. (46)

Neil Besner writes that "Herbert's inability to remember, his dislike of barriers such as introspection or too much talk, effectively estranges him from his own past" (84). Herbert is one of the many Germans who has "chosen to forget Germany's past and begin life afresh" (Hatch, "Fascism" 14).

Despite Herbert's unwillingness to remember the past (and the parallel which can be drawn with other Germans who wish to forget), the past remains in the foreground. Hatch writes:

In Gallant's narrative schema, the reader exists for moments in both the past and the present, and therefore perceives the past as it continues to exist unrecognized in the present--a perception for the most part unavailable to, or denied by the characters in the stories. ("Fascism" 37)

Many of the above references, which can apply both to Christine's present and to the events of the Second World War, are examples of this duality, this parallelism of reference. A final example is found in the last incident of the novella. Christine and little Bert are sitting in the waiting room at the Pegnitz Junction with several women of different nationalities: "Polish, French, Greek, Russian, Dutch" (79). Christine has just intimidated the conductor, who was frightening the women with a show of authority: "some of them [the women] looked positively ill with terror" (81). Christine is wondering whether she and little Bert should join Herbert outside.

While she was wondering and weighing, as reluctant as ever to make up her mind, a great stir started up in the grey and wintry-looking freight yards they could see from the window. Lights blazed, voices bawled in dialect, a dog barked. As if they knew what this animation meant and had been waiting for it, the women picked up their parcels and filed out without haste and without looking back. (87)

The women's unhurried departure, carrying their "luggage tied with string" (79), is another reference back to the past: to the herding of people onto trains, bound for the concentration camps. Besner, speaking of the references to the Second World War, writes:

All of these allusions, direct and indirect, to the 'Adolf time' form an increasingly ominous background for the train ride, which ends in Pegnitz in a flurry of soldiers, of posturing authority and terrified passengers. (87)

As the number of references in which the past and the present occur simultaneously multiplies, so too does the reader's perception that Gallant perceives the past as continually operating in the present, "recreat[ing] itself in daily life unless recognized and exposed" (Hatch, "Fascism" 37).

Critics have classified this duality of reference under many terms: Janice Kulyk Keefer calls the journey an "extended inverted parody . . . an ironic mimesis of the trip to 'Pichipoi'" (173); George Woodcock speaks of the "much stronger element of intentional symbolism than one finds elsewhere in Mavis Gallant's stories" (86) and describes "the train journey as an elaborate figure, representing the wanderings, without a yet assured destination, of a Germany that has not recovered a sense of its role in history" (86). Neil Besner also sees the train journey as an elaborate figure: "the train's meandering course across France and into Germany seems to epitomize the general aimlessness of contemporary German culture" (82). Besner also writes that "[i]mages from the past, specifically of the war, intrude everywhere into the present" (83). Woodcock sees the journey as a metaphor for the present; Keefer sees it as a parody of the past; Besner, recognizing that "the reader exists for moments in both the past and the present" (Hatch,

"Fascism" 37), incorporates both views into his analysis. Gallant reconstructs history in "The Pegnitz Junction"; she shows how the past and the present overlap, braid together to form a polyphonic text. As Hatch writes:

Gallant's deconstruction may be less flamboyant than Heller's [in Catch-22], but it is also more extensive, since it forces the reader to see the war as continuing into the present. ("Fascism" 26)

How then, does one interpret this juxtaposition of forgetfulness of the past with the constant explosive reminders with which Gallant mines her text? The indirect references to the past remind one of Gallant's initial reaction, as a young journalist in Montreal, to the first pictures out of the concentration camps.<sup>15</sup> Gallant's reaction was not to over-use adjectives; instead, she let the pictures speak for themselves and let the audience draw their own conclusions. In "The Pegnitz Junction," Gallant repeats the same tactic: she allows the past to speak for itself, without any direct authorial comment.<sup>16</sup> Through this tactic, Gallant avoids sensationalizing her material, a problem inherent in references to the Holocaust. As Keefer explains:

Gallant, as a writer, faces the dilemma of needing to incorporate catastrophic historical events and terms in her fiction without turning them into kitsch. She uses, and shows her characters using, events such as the

deportation of European Jews to death camps, not to drop a penny in the slot of instant poignancy and horror, but to differentiate such history from, yet relate it to, the process of everyday living: to the lives of people safe in their houses. (171)

The people "safe in their houses" contain the same "small possibilities" for fascism as any other, as Gallant demonstrates in her characterization of one of Christine's fellow-passengers, Frau Joseph Schneider. These people also bear responsibility for the events which occurred during the Second World War. The question of responsibility for one's actions can best be examined through an analysis of Gallant's construction of the ethical or religious area of the cultural code.

The symbolic antithesis between culture and barbarism is also present in the ethical or religious aspect of the cultural code. Mavis Gallant lists Christianity as one of the cultural forces which had not been a "retaining wall" (Hancock 99) against the forces of fascism; in an interview with Geoff Hancock, she asks: "What happened to the people who produced Bach and Goethe, who had been singing 'A Mighty Fortress is our God' since the Renaissance?" (Hancock 99). "The Pegnitz Junction" is part of her answer to this question.

"The Pegnitz Junction" is structured around a journey motif, which suggests parallels with the Christian idea of life as a spiritual journey. Christine's name, which is Greek and means "fair Christian," is significant: like Christian from The Pilgrim's Progress, Christine could be seen as a symbol of the Christian soul on a journey to salvation. But, in Gallant's world, salvation is an ambiguous concept.

Christine is accompanied on her journey by Herbert, whose Teutonic name means warrior, and little (Her)Bert or "(Herr)Bert" (Besner 91). Herbert is, however, neither a warrior nor a Christian. He is a pacifist who accepts all displays of authority; his response to difficulties is to compose imaginary letters to the proper authorities. Ronald Hatch notes that Herbert "can never confront a threatening situation openly. He retreats, and then writes letters, taking refuge in the printed word" ("Mavis" 69). Herbert's only connection to religion is his mother, who "had been arrested and



put in a camp when he was three" (13) for her religious beliefs. Herbert's response to religion is linked to his feelings for his mother, whose "life and her death gave him such mixed feelings, made him so sad and uncomfortable, that he would say nothing except 'Oh, a Christian sermon?' when something reminded him of it" (14). His son is being raised, in Christine's opinion, "without discipline, without religion, without respect, belief, or faith" (13). Religion, for Christine's companions, is something that has been abandoned to the past; the new generation (represented by little Bert) has no knowledge of it.

Instead of the Bible, Christine carries "a paperback volume of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's essays tucked in behind her handbag" (11). Neil Besner explains that

Bonhoeffer was martyred by the Nazis for his resistance; his Letters and Papers from Prison are exhortations to individuals to assume responsibility for their actions, to take courage in their Christian faith. (90)

Despite the fact that Christine carries the book for the entire journey, and opens it several times to read, only two sentences from the book are given. Instead of reading Bonhoeffer, Christine finds herself inventing stories for little Bert about his sponge, Bruno. As little Bert complains, none of these stories are ever finished, a statement which applies to all the stories Christine receives and to the novella itself.

Christine carries the paperback because her fiance, a theology student, will be taking an exam in two day's time, an

exam which is for students who have failed their year. Besner sees the failure of the theology student to pass the exam as a general indictment on society, "a general failure to pass Bonhoeffer's rigorous test" (90). And, indeed, most of the characters the reader encounters are not willing to take responsibility for their actions or to take courage in faith. One example is Herbert's mother. She is described as "more pious than political, one of a flock milling around a stubborn pastor" (13). This seems a positive virtue; however, Herbert's mother is revealed to be "one of a flock," a follower who cannot sustain her religious beliefs once within the concentration camps.

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. (13)

All of the parallelisms listed in the above quotation reflect the central antithesis of the symbolic code. Culture, here represented by religion, should ensure that a person maintains his or her beliefs and values; in Christian religion these values would include virtue, charity, tolerance, generosity and faith. Herbert's mother failed Bonhoeffer's test; she did not take courage in her faith. Once out of the camp, she spent her time eating and complaining about the other prisoners: "the Slav prisoners were selfish, the Dutch greedy, the French

self-seeking and dirty" (13). Despite this fact, Herbert thinks of her as someone who "had defended her faith to the extreme limit" (47). Herbert is confusing the profession of faith with faith itself, for though his mother went into the camps with faith, she "came out alone."

Another character who confuses a profession of faith with the genuine article is Frau Schneider. The reader assumes that Frau Schneider is nominally Lutheran; the two families remain in their neighborhood because "there was a Lutheran school for the child" (44). The nominal profession of religion, however, does not mean that Frau Schneider passes Bonhoeffer's test: Frau Schneider, like Herbert's unnamed mother, is both racist and uncharitable. Frau Schneider is anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic, and anti-black. She describes President Roosevelt as "a Dutch Jew" (39) whose father "stole the Russian Imperial jewels after the Bolshevik revolution" (39). She twice says that "[f]irst the block around us got Catholic then it got black. That's the way it usually goes" (44). From the comment that the families remained in the neighborhood anyway, for the sake of her niece's school, the reader deduces that Frau Schneider welcomed neither of the above groups. Frau Schneider's lack of charity extends even to her own family: she makes disparaging remarks about her cousin's wife and daughter and tends her husband's grave only because there is an eight hundred dollar financial incentive involved. Frau Schneider is another of Gallant's characters who, while initially seeming harmless, demonstrates fascism's "small possibilities in people."

One incident demonstrates how Gallant delineates the

confusion between actual faith and the profession of faith in "The Pegnitz Junction." Frau Schneider's interior monologue frequently shifts to her niece, "God's own darling, our precious Carol Ann" (34). At one point, Frau Schneider thinks back to an incident at Carol Ann's school. The principal of the school wishes to raise money for the school through the sale of crosses. Frau Schneider's memories show that the sale of the crosses had little to do with religion. Her cousin, a strict Lutheran, refuses to have anything resembling a crucifix in his house because "[o]nce you accept a cross with a person on it, they're in, he said, meaning the Catholics" (51). His wife is solely concerned about matching the cross with the colours of Carol Ann's bedroom, white and blue. Religious meaning has been replaced with form and fashion; as with Herbert's mother, only the outward show of religion is significant. The crowning irony is expressed in Frau Schneider's final thoughts on the incident.

The principal of that school had good ideas but went too far sometimes, though his aim was just to make people better Christians. The school earned quite a lot on the sale of the crosses, which went toward buying a dishwasher cut-rate from the Flushing factory. All the children were good Christians and the principal strove to make them better. (52)

The aim of the principal--"to make people better Christians"--is juxtaposed with the ultimate purpose of the sale--"buying a dishwasher cut-rate from the Flushing factory." Religion is

reduced to materialism.

The opposition between religion and secularism in "The Pegnitz Junction" has been noted by several critics. Lorna Irvine writes, "the story does emphasize the tension between the religious and the secular life" (134). Irvine quotes Roland Hatch, who points out that the two men in Christine's life, the unnamed, unseen theology student and Herbert, an engineer, embody this central opposition between religion and secularism.<sup>17</sup> Neil Besner writes that the opening scene from the hotel room in Paris sets the stage for the opposition. In the hotel room, "[t]he view from every window was of a church covered in scaffolding from top to bottom . . . a sign went up saying that a new car park was to be built under the church" (5). "The view announces the toppling of religious and natural orders alike as the contemporary secular age advances" (Besner 85). The ironic naming of a character such as Herbert, for whom religion is associated with an unpleasant memory of the past, the reduction of religion to materialism in Frau Schneider's monologue, the inability of religious values to act as a bulwark against hate--all of these demonstrate the paucity of the traditional religious values (virtue, charity, tolerance, generosity and faith) in the lives of the characters in "The Pegnitz Junction."

Gallant, in "The Pegnitz Junction," addresses the problem of retaining ethical values in a secular world. Her technique is not to tell the reader how one should do this; instead, she constructs the religious beliefs of the characters and, in doing so, highlights the contradictions contained within these

beliefs. Herbert's mother is one example of Gallant's reconstruction of religious values. Frau Schneider is another character whom Gallant uses to show the juxtaposition of religious affirmation with spiritual bankruptcy. Gallant's technique, however, does not allow the reader simply to pass judgement on her characters. In her text, the distinction between good and evil--in the symbolic code, the central antithesis between civilization and barbarism--is never easy.

Frau Schneider touches upon this distinction in one of her thoughts about her cousin.

My cousin-in-law never understood the television. She'd say, 'Are they the good ones or the bad ones?' We'd say this one's bad, that one's good. She would say, 'Then why are they dressed the same way?' If the bad and the good had the same kind of suits on she couldn't follow. (52)

The above quotation highlights the problems of distinguishing good from evil. In the same way, the reader is uncertain of how to judge the characters in "The Pegnitz Junction." A character such as Frau Schneider is obviously racist, given her overheard thoughts about Jews, Catholics, and blacks. Yet this same woman hands around postcards from "Dubrovnik, Edinburgh, Abidjan, Pisa, Madrid, Sofia, Nice" (39) on which her friends have written "'Very nice friendly people here!'" Should this message be interpreted ironically, as a comment on the distance between thoughts and actions, or as a commentary on the inanities which

people generally write on postcards? Or is it a comment on the way in which people will hate an entire race or religion yet find representative individuals "'nice friendly people"? Frau Schneider certainly demonstrates "fascism's small possibilities in people" and yet, as Lorna Irvine points out, she also "demonstrates the uncelebrated nurturing and perseverance that constitute many silent female lives" (137). And, as an enemy alien who lived in United States during the second World War, she is also one of the victims of the war. Gallant never allows the reader only one interpretation of characters and events: alternatives always occur. The ethical problem of distinguishing "'the good ones or the bad ones'" (52) is left to the reader to decide.

Gallant's final reconstruction of ethics/religion in "The Pegnitz Junction" occurs in Gallant's literary equivalent of limbo, the Pegnitz Junction itself. Christine and little Bert are sitting in the waiting room at the Pegnitz Junction. Little Bert asks Christine to read something about Bruno. "[S]he opened [the book] near the beginning and read the first thing she came to: "'Shame and remorse are generally mistaken for one another." It's no good reading that'" (80). Immediately after Christine reads this, the train conductor appears and, "being something of a comedian, did an excellent imitation of someone throwing a silent tantrum" (80). Besner points out that this tantrum recalls "Hitler's histrionics, or Chaplin's imitations of Hitler's histrionics" (91). The tantrum frightens the other women in the waiting room but not Christine, who challenges the conductor. He immediately backs down and becomes fearful that

Christine will report him. He defends himself by saying, "I was kind on the train. I let you keep the window open when we went through the fire zone" (81). He then asks Christine if she will 'testify' for him, if asked. The word 'testify' recalls the trials for the war crimes; the conductor is linked with all those who were guilty of crimes against humanity during the Second World War. The conductor is a living example of Bonhoeffer's statement, someone who confuses shame, or a sense of having done something wrong, with remorse, which is regret for one's sins or wrongful acts. He feels shame for his actions, but not regret or guilt. Neil Besner quotes Gallant on the subject of the guilt: "As for guilt--who can assume guilt for a government? People are more apt to remember what was done to them rather than what was done in their name to others" (92). The conductor is yet another example of a character who refuses to assume responsibility for his actions. He too fails Bonhoeffer's test.

In the final incident of the novella, when Christine and little Bert are sitting in the waiting room, little Bert asks Christine to read.

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." (87)

Christine's comment could be taken as a rejection of religion itself. If man can only know good and evil when separated from



God, then separation from God (the absence of religion) is necessary for an ethical life. The interjection of Frau Schneider's last thought strengthens the case against religion. Frau Schneider is thinking back to a comment she made earlier of her niece: "Carol Ann threw the school up to us, said it was a ghetto, said she had to go to speech classes at the age of twenty to learn to pronounce 'th'" (44). After Christine has read Bonhoeffer's sentence, she receives one final thought from Frau Schneider: "When Carol Ann learned to pronounce 'th' did that make her a better Christian? Perhaps it did. Perhaps it took just that one thing to make her a better Christian" (88). How does one interpret this thought? Ironically? As a rejection of religion, which, when interpreted through Frau Schneider's viewpoint, has degenerated to a matter of pronunciations and form (as the case of the blue and white cross demonstrated)? The metaphorical religious journey undertaken in "The Pegnitz Junction" ends at the junction itself, a stopping place but not the final destination of Christine and the other characters. Religion itself is also left in limbo.

Christine rejects both of Bonhoeffer's sentences and returns to her story of the five brothers: "Brune had five brothers, all named Georg. But Georg was pronounced five different ways in the family, so there was no confusion" (88). As Besner writes, "the fact that Christine's last word is a story about brotherhood and community, told to a child, indicates at least the hope for a new direction" (92). Christine's final story is also an indication of the writerly nature of "The Pegnitz Junction." Unfortunately for the reader, the different

interpretations of the religious aspect of the cultural code do cause uncertainty. The reader, given the choice of different pronunciations, must choose the one (or the many) which best seems to capture the presentation of religion in the text.

The final subset of the cultural code which I wish to examine corresponds to the subject of the first chapter of this thesis: the examination of the semic code in "Its Image on the Mirror." This division of the cultural code -- Barthes' treatise on psychology (specifically ethnic psychology) -- contributes to Gallant's formation of characters (the semic code) in "The Pegnitz Junction."

In "Its Image on the Mirror," symbolic oppositions are intricately linked to the semic code: characters define themselves according to their similarities to or differences from other characters. The characters also construct their identities in conformity to the Lacanian model of subjectivity. The narrator of the novella, Jean Price, is the most interesting example of these two techniques of subject construction: 1) she defines her own identity by looking at "the image on the mirror" which she wishes to be, the image of her sister, Isobel; and 2) she constructs her identity through the four registers of the Lacanian model of subjectivity, specifically through registers two to four: the mirror stage, the access to language, and the Oedipus complex.

In "The Pegnitz Junction" characters are also defined by their similarities to or differences from an 'image'. In this text, however, the image is not of another person, it is of a race. The characters in "The Pegnitz Junction" are both defined and simultaneously un-defined by their "Germanness." The German ideology associated with Hitler's Nazism--the concept of an

Aryan super-race--is parodied through Gallant's characters. Catherine Belsey explains the "it is the role of ideology to construct people as subjects [Belsey's emphasis]" (58). Gallant uses ideology to construct her subjects. In the process, she deconstructs the reader's view of 'reality', a reality that has been formed by the cultural code. Barthes writes that "these codes [the divisions of the cultural code], by a swivel characteristic of bourgeois ideology, which turns culture into nature, appear to establish reality" (206). The stereotypical characteristics of the German race, as represented by Nazi ideology--the Aryan look (blonde hair, blue eyes), obedience to authority, and militarism--are what the reader accepts as 'reality', yet this 'reality' is deconstructed in Gallant's construction of her characters in "The Pegnitz Junction."

One typical characteristic associated with Germans is the Aryan look: blond hair and blue eyes. Gallant makes several references to this Aryan look. In the opening description of Christine there is the following reference to her hair: "Her light hair would have been brown, about the color of brown sugar, if she had not rinsed it in camomile and whenever possible dried it in sunlight" (3). Blonde hair, that stereotypical Aryan physical characteristic, is here manufactured, fake. Indeed, Christine would go further and bleach her hair but "she could not use a commercial bleach because of some vague promise she had given her late grandmother" (3-4). The reason for the "vague promise" is not given: it could be a simple prejudice against commercial bleach or an injunction against conforming to an Aryan stereotype which

the grandmother, if not Christine, would remember. Gallant has already subverted any classification of Christine by comparing her to her home city, "which now looked as pink and golden as a pretty child and as new as morning" (3). Christine is part of the new Germany, in which everything seems new and the past has been forgotten. As Ronald Hatch writes: "Gallant realized that after the war a large proportion of the nation's people had chosen to forget Germany's past and begin life afresh" ("Mavis" 14). Yet, as has already been shown in other sections (the discussion of the historical element of the cultural code, for example), the associations of the past cannot be forgotten. A detail as simple as hair colour, in a text like "The Pegnitz Junction," is capable of calling up memories of the past.

Other characters who embody the Aryan look include the Norwegian and the two children whom Herbert becomes enamoured of: the "bossy little blonde" (20) and Julchen Knopp, who is "a fair, rosy, curly, simpering, stupid-looking child" (41-42). The Norwegian is described as "a man as tall as Herbert, wearing a blonde beard" (16). He has "eyes as blue as a doll's, and [a] bald spot like a tonsure" (16). The Norwegian's ethnic identity (which is emphasized by the fact that he is not given a name and is referred to only as "the Norwegian") is significant, given that a fascist government governed in Norway from 1940 to 1945, a government that was kept in power through German support. The Norwegian, as the most perfect embodiment of the Aryan look, is associated with fascism, yet at the same time he is both non-German and a victim of fascist aggression. Near the end of the novella, Christine and the Norwegian see yet another

group of conscripts. Christine tries to apologize for them.

Christine said, "They are only farmers' sons who have been drafted, you know. Poor lads who have never studied anything. Boys like that must exist everywhere, even where you come from. . . . They do seem to be little and ugly." She paused. "It's not their fault."

"They always looked that way," said the Norwegian. "They were always very little and very ugly, but they frightened us." (75)

Gallant, as she did with Frau Schneider, blurs the distinction between aggressor and victim. The Aryan look, which would commonly be associated with Nazism and aggression, is, in "The Pegnitz Junction," principally used to describe non-Germans and children. Neither of the two principal German characters who were alive during the second World War conforms to the Aryan look. The only description of Herbert which is given is that he is "tall, intelligent, brave and good-looking" (46). The old woman from America has "sparse orange-blond hair done up in a matted beehive, a long nose, [and] small gray eyes" (17). The impression the reader gains of Frau Schneider is of a witch-like crone or of someone who, like Christine, has a manufactured Aryan appearance. Nor do the actual soldiers whom Christine sees from the train conform to the look. The soldiers in one detachment of army conscripts are described as "small, round-shouldered, rather dark. Blond, blue-eyed genes were on the wane in Europe" (50). The meanings which the reader would

normally associate with the Aryan look (fascism, aggression, militarism) are subverted by Gallant's assignment of the signifier to unlikely characters, characters for whom the meanings cannot apply.

Gallant uses the same technique to reconstruct the concept of German militarism. All of the descriptions of the army conscripts de-emphasize their authority. The group which Christine and the Norwegian discuss is "lounging and sitting slumped on their luggage, yelling at one another and laughing foolishly" (75). In an earlier description of "four future conscripts of the new anti-authoritarian army" (42), Gallant details the less-than-impressive future careers of the conscripts<sup>18</sup> and then comments that what Christine has just seen "was the decline of the next generation" (42). Herbert's reaction to the sight of another group of conscripts is to brood as if he is

dwelling on a deep inner hurt. Christine knew that he felt intense disgust for men-at-arms in general, but for untidy soldiers in particular. His look may have meant that even to a pacifist soldiers are supposed to look like soldiers; they should salute smartly, stare you frankly in the face, keep their shoes shined and their hair trimmed. (51)

The ironic undercutting present in the comment that Herbert "felt intense disgust . . . for untidy soldiers in particular" reinforces the parody of both Herbert's pacifist stance and the

accepted idea of what soldiers should be like. Gallant's conscripts represent the transgression of both Herbert and the reader's expectations; the reader's concept of what a soldier is "supposed to look like" is challenged.

In contrast to the unimpressive "anti-authoritarian" army, is the "horde of fierce little girls" (20) which overruns the railway carriage. The group of children is described as a "commando" (20), a military unit trained for surprise raids. Besner describes this group as "warlike" and "military" and certainly the reader must view these children as more military-seeming than any of the described army conscripts. The contrast between the army conscripts and the "commando" of little girls contributes to Gallant's reconstruction of the concept of German militarism: even little girls are more military than army conscripts.

This reconstruction of the concept of German militarism is continued in the characterization of Herbert. Herbert's name, as has been mentioned, means warrior; however, Herbert himself is far from warrior-like. He is, as Besner describes him, "the progressive, liberal, 'pacifist, anti-state' (and yet also ominously passive, 'sleepwalking, dreaming') engineer" (83). Despite the constant reminders of both the war and its continuing effects on German life, Herbert tries to close his eyes to anything military, just as he turns little Bert's head away from the plaque commemorating "a time of ancient misery" (11). When Christine tries to read little Bert a story about Bruno, Herbert objects to the military content:



"'It was the fourteenth of July in Paris. Bruno put on his blue-and-gold uniform with the tassels and buttons shining . . .' "

"No, no," said Herbert. "Nothing military." (18)

The proof of Herbert's pacifism is given in the following sentence: "His pacifism was certainly real--little Bert was not allowed to have any military toys" (51). The ironic undercutting present in this statement makes Herbert's pacificism not laudable but laughable. Gallant further ridicules Herbert's pacifism by exposing the gaps in his beliefs, a "point of contradiction within the text" (Belsey 104). She writes that Herbert "was pacifist and anti-state, but he expected a great deal in the way of behaviour from civil servants, especially those wearing a uniform" (16). Herbert, though pacifist and anti-state, still has certain expectations of both the military and the state: expectations which, like the reader's, are subverted.

The concept of German respect for authority is another stereotypical German characteristic which is re-written and revised in "The Pegnitz Junction." Herbert is a notable example of this trait. The first example occurs when Christine and Herbert are involved in a confrontation with the French porter at the hotel at which they are staying. The porter prevents Christine from having a bath early in the morning, because he says it is "'[t]oo late for noise'" (7). Herbert accepts the porter's authority "without standing his ground for a second. It was as if he were under arrest, or as though the porter's old

pajama top masked the badge of his office, his secret credentials" (7). As Neil Besner writes: "Herbert's docility seems to be a habitual response to displays of authority; his quiescence is that of one acculturated to totalitarian posturing" (85). In a later event, in which Christine asks Herbert why he won't speak to a stranger, Herbert responds, "'I saw the way he was watching you. Don't you know a policeman when you see one?'" (63). The fear of authority, with its hidden badge of office, influences the lives of characters who are surrounded by the constant reminders of the war. The above confrontation takes place at a station which is "a few feet from a barbed-wire frontier, where someone had been shot to death only a week ago" (54). At the same time that Gallant seems to mock Herbert's passivity and unreasonable fear and respect of authority, she also reminds the reader of the conditions which created these emotions. However, Herbert is not entirely docile. He, like the art curator, composes letters of protest to the newspapers; after Herbert tells Christine that he intends to write a complaint to the Guide Michelin about the hotel in Paris, Christine thinks, "[s]ometimes Herbert meant more than he said; if so, the porter might have something to fear" (8). However, the actual fate of the proposed letter of complaint remains unresolved, as does the fate of Herbert's imaginary letter of protest concerning the train facilities.

Herbert told Christine that he had folded and sealed his imaginary letter of protest and was mailing it in his head to papers in Frankfurt, Hamburg, West Berlin...

-- 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. (55)

Any effect Herbert's actions may have (if indeed the letter is ever written and mailed) is negated by the last sentence. Herbert's actions of protest, even if undertaken, are muted by his unwillingness to challenge "the elected government" and its officials; he is a puppet to authority figures because he remains bound to this "exaggerated respect for authority" (Keefer 176).

In contrast, Christine is able to defy authority figures. Besner argues that Christine, a product of the new Germany, reacts in a different manner towards authoritarianism, and indeed, Christine does stand up to the porter.<sup>14</sup> She also defies (for a time) the order to close the windows on the train. Christine is representative of the new German generation, which has the power to disregard authority: for example, the "commando" of little girls ignores the train's conductor, who "stumbled along saying 'No standing,' quite hopelessly, not really expecting anyone to obey" (21). The same conductor terrifies a group of older women at the Pegnitz Junction and it is again Christine who must stand up to this show of authority:

She [Christine] was surprised to feel the panic--  
stronger than mere disapproval--that the other women  
were signalling now. She wondered if they weren't  
simply pretending to take fright. It was so evident

that he had no power! Why, even the little girls from the summer camp had not been taken in. (80-81)

The ability to recognize false authority belongs to the younger generation of Germans; in this, Gallant seems to indicate some hope for the future. This particular German stereotype is reconstructed through the younger generation.

Janice Kulyk Keefer mentions other stereotypes that Gallant reconstructs in her portrayal of characters in "The Pegnitz Junction." Keefer writes:

Gallant would seem to be complicating the stereotype of 'sales Boches' with which she begins 'The Pegnitz Junction'. She gives us the regulation cliches--the German obsession with eating well and often, with cleanliness, with obedience to orders no matter how ridiculous or insane, and the exaggerated respect for authority--but mediates them according to a perspective from and on female experience. . . (Keefer 176).

Frau Schneider, with her obsession with food, is certainly a parody of one stereotype ("eating well and often") and Christine's comments about the trains and the railway facilities as well as Herbert's views on "untidy soldiers" (51) conform to Keefer's stereotype of Germans who are obsessed with cleanliness. Herbert is also, as has been discussed above, a character who has an "exaggerated respect for authority." I would argue, however, that Gallant goes further than mediating

these views according to female experience; she reconstructs these stereotypes, just as in the short story "Ernst in Civilian Clothes" she reconstructs myths about the Hitler Youth. Frau Schneider is, as Barbara Gabriel calls her, a "kind of grotesque" (24), such an obvious parody of a stereotype that she negates the stereotype itself. The Norwegian is the most obvious example of the Aryan look, yet he clearly cannot be classified as a German. Christine and the little girls are as German as Herbert and the conductor, yet they are not frightened by the "[t]he empty posturing of authority--the 'small possibility' of fascism in individuals" (Besner 88). Gallant, through her method of assigning certain signifiers to her characters, reconstructs the concept of a specific German identity. The signifiers which the reader expects will be assigned to German characters (the Aryan look, militarism, a respect for authority) are either assigned to other characters or are parodied and subverted in the German characters. Mavis Gallant reconstructs the image of "Germanness" in "The Pegnitz Junction" and leaves the reader to make the final judgement on what the German image should be.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis is to dis-cover the writerly elements of two of Mavis Gallant's texts, "Its Image on the Mirror" and "The Pegnitz Junction." Critics have had difficulties in defining the boundaries of Gallant's work. Various critics have classifed her work as realism, modernism, and postmodernism.<sup>1</sup> Yet all of these categories are in some ways inadequate.

It is Gallant's use of language that both invites the reader to see her work as 'reality' and, at the same time, moves her work beyond realism. Janice Kulyk Keefer writes of the "freedom of [Gallant's] language either to pin down the most finicky detail of a situation or else to cloud and obscure what seems the simplest and most general precepts" (57). Gallant's language has "the problematic nature of signs somewhere between transparency and opaqueness" (Siemerling 144). The writerly quality of her language causes problems for the critics both in the analysis (and judgment) and the classification of her work.<sup>2</sup>

Roland Barthes' binary classification of texts as writerly/readerly is useful in moving the reader/critic beyond this impasse in classification. An understanding of Gallant's fictions as writerly texts, in which the restraints of fixed meaning and the tendency towards closure are broken, helps the reader to grasp both the modus of construction in "Its Image on the Mirror" and "The Pegnitz Junction" and the way in which Gallant uses language itself to undercut both the 'reality effect' created by language and the reader's expectations for

'truth' and closure. In Gallant's texts, there is no single fixed 'truth' to be dis-covered; instead, the reader (and/or critic) participates in constructing a "plurality of meaning" (Barthes, "From Work to Text" 715).

Catherine Belsey writes that "the plural text requires the production of meanings through the identification of its polyphony" (105). The reader must have a method of identifying this "polyphony"; Barthes' model from S/Z (with some modification) lends itself to this task. Barthes's five codes offer a means of examining the plurality of meaning in a text. The five codes braid together the signifiers of the text and offer an opportunity for analysis of the "point[s] of contradiction within the text, the point[s] at which it transgresses the limits within which it is constructed, breaks free of the constraints imposed by its own realist form" (Belsey 104). These points of contradiction in the two texts under examination, "Its Image on the Mirror" and "The Pegnitz Junction," are the focus of this thesis.

"Its Image on the Mirror" seems, at first glance, to have all the characteristics of classic realism (as defined by Belsey): illusionism, closure, and a hierarchy of discourses. However, the appearance of reality is suspect in the novella, as is demonstrated in the analysis of the symbolic code. In the final passage of the novella, the narrator, Jean Price, negates the reality of the preceding events. The reader dis-covers, upon closer examination, that these events were exposed as writerly events throughout the novella. Given the absence of an authoritative voice which presents the 'true' reality of the

text, the reader must decide for herself whether or not the narrated events are dreams or reality. The participatory role of the reader in creating the 'truth' or 'truths' of Jean's narration turns "Its Image on the Mirror" into a writerly text.

The lack of closure in "Its Image on the Mirror" also marks the novella as a writerly text. The mysteries of the text (the 'truth' about both Jean and Isobel) are never revealed. The reader does not dis-cover the 'truth' about Jean's past nor the secret which Jean says she holds about Isobel. Part of the reason why the 'truth' is not revealed is because of the unreliable nature of Jean's narration: there is no privileged voice within the text to reveal the 'truth'. The missing pieces and the points of contradiction in Jean's narration become more significant than the disclosures: the lack of closure leads to a plurality of meaning in the text.

In "The Pegnitz Junction," the points of contradiction can be dis-covered through an examination of the cultural code. The cultural code in this text encompasses Gallant's examination of German culture and all its aspects: literature, art, history, ethics, and psychology. Gallant reconstructs German culture and in the process demonstrates that 'truth' depends upon perspective: there are many 'truths' to be dis-covered. In the sections on literature and psychology, Gallant presents characters who appear to embody certain stereotypes but who actually subvert these stereotypes. In the section on art, she reconstructs several ideas about German culture. The section on history demonstrates how the past and the present overlap in Gallant's texts, braid together into a polyphonic text. The



section on ethics presents several different interpretations of religion. A central motif which demonstrates how Gallant's language works in the novella is the story about Bruno's five brothers, which Christine tells to little Bert. This story illustrates the way in which meaning depends upon interpretation: words do not have one meaning but several.

"Its Image on the Mirror" and "The Pegnitz Junction" are writerly texts. A writerly text "engages the reader or viewer in a productive rather than a consumptive capacity" (Silverman 246).<sup>3</sup> The reader/critic interprets the text, "not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it. (Barthes, S/Z 5). In both texts, readers must choose between meanings as Gallant braids her signifiers together into polyphonic texts. The task in dis-covering the writerly text, in creating its meanings, is to identify the different voices of the text, its polyphony. Silverman writes that the task of the reader, in dis-covering the writerly text, is "to reveal the terms of its [the text's] own construction" (246). In Belsey's words, the reader/critic deconstructs the text; he/she forces the text to reveal its plurality. In this thesis, I have attempted to force two texts, "Its Image on the Mirror" and "The Pegnitz Junction" to reveal the terms of their construction and thereby to show their plural natures. This is, as Belsey writes, the work of criticism.<sup>4</sup>

1

Judith Skelton Grant's article on Gallant in Canadian Writers and their Works: Fiction Series Vol. 8, mentions several critics who see these themes as an important part of Gallant's fiction and adds that, "[e]xile, expatriation, and rootlessness, themes typical of the modern short story, began to be perceived as recurrent in her [Gallant's] fiction" (33). Neil Besner's book, The Light of Imagination, is a study of the importance of "the linked terms of 'memory, imagination, [and] artifice'" (Godard 77) to Gallant's fiction. Besner states that "the processes through which memory asserts its truth are always significant" (27) in Gallant's fiction. He writes that the act of remembering is particularly important to "Its Image on the Mirror":

In My Heart is Broken, the recurring concern with returns to the past, or with banishment from the past, calls attention to both the act and the art of remembering, which is a central theme in the short novel "Its Image on the Mirror." (27)

2

In The Oxford Companion to the English Language, one of the definitions for 'text' is "[i]n literary criticism, a piece of writing complete in itself and forming the object of analytical study" (1038). As the object of this thesis is analytical study of two of Gallant's novellas, both of which are complete in themselves, I have chosen to use the word 'text' to refer to "Its Image on the Mirror" and "The Pegnitz Junction." The word is especially appropriate to my model of examination (Barthes' codes) for the word itself is derived from the Latin textere/textum, which means 'to weave'. Barthes' codes weave the signifiers of the text together.

3

Ronald Hatch writes that "Certainly Gallant is a 'realist' writer, but obviously her handling of narrative structures takes her well beyond any simplistic notion of realism" ("Three" 99). Lawrence Matthews speaks of the "world of concrete, sensory realism" (160) in the stories in From the Fifteenth District; Barbara Godard classifies Gallant's "early work in the mode of psychological realism" (75). George Woodcock classifies the "The Pegnitz Junction" as an exception to the body of Gallant's work; he writes that this novella "is the most experimental of Gallant's works, in which she makes no attempt at that special Gallant realism [my emphasis] where the web of memory provides the mental links that make for plausibility" (86).

4

For a more detailed definition of illusionism, closure, and a hierarchy of discourses, refer to Catherine Belsey's Critical Practice, specifically chapter 3, "Addressing the Subject," pages 67-84.

5

Judith Skelton Grant notes that Gallant's "mode, as John Metcalf points out in 'The Curate's Egg,' is the modern short story" (31): see the following discussion for details about Grant's classification of Gallant as a writer of modern stories.

6

See footnote #1 for a discussion of the importance of these themes to modern fiction.

7

I have hyphenated the word 'dis-cover' in order to foreground its meaning as an excavation of language itself, the way in which layers of meaning are un-covered and dis-covered through an analysis of Gallant's language.

8

Whenever I use the term "deconstruction" within this thesis, I am referring to Belsey's specific definition of the term. Belsey defines deconstruction as the identification of the polyphony or plurality of a text. Belsey writes: "Deconstruction in order to reconstruct the text as a newly intelligible, plural object is the work of criticism" (105). Ronald Hatch uses the term "deconstruction" in much the same way when describing the plural nature of Gallant's texts: "The term deconstruction is nevertheless worth retaining in connection with Gallant's fiction, since it points to her technique of unfolding apparently transparent ideas and language to reveal their highly ambiguous natures once the assumptions of a given cultural base stand revealed" ("Fascism" 38). Deconstruction is its specific Derridean sense is not the aim of this thesis.

9

For readers interested in a more detailed analysis of the proairetic code in Gallant's fiction, see Grazia Merler's work.

For a more detailed analysis of Belsey's three characteristics of classic realism, see the chapter entitled "Addressing the Subject" from Critical Practice, specifically the discussion which begins on page 70.

This quotation and all further references from "Its Image on the Mirror" are from Mavis Gallant's My Heart is Broken.

Jewison argues that the Labor Day weekend (from the second section of the novella) may actually have occurred in September of 1958, and not 1955 as Jean claims. Jewison's arguments are the following: 1) "Some of Jean's contradictions [about dates] are so obvious that they cannot be authorial mistakes" (101-102); 2) at the end of the novella, Jean says that her husband, Tom, claims that they last saw Isobel in 1958; and 3) Jean says that "Poppy Duncan was an adolescent when the family was reunited on Labor Day 1955" (102) but Jewison believes that Poppy was born in late 1945 and therefore would only be ten (at the oldest) in September of 1955. This last point is an error on Jewison's part. Poppy was, according to Jean, born sometime in 1944: Jean says of Frank's Christmas leave in 1944 that one of the reasons why Frank was returning to England was because he "had left behind a girl whose daughter had since been born" (133). Poppy would therefore be at least eleven or twelve in September of 1955 and would qualify as an adolescent. The second point could also be discounted: Jean says that Tom's memory was "for dates, not for feelings" (154); conversely, Jean's memory could be only for emotions. Jean may have seen Isobel since the Labor Day weekend, but the meeting could have been less emotionally significant than the one in 1955.

Catherine Belsey, describing the stages of Lacan's model of subjectivity, writes that:

it is only with its entry into language that the child becomes a full subject. If it is to participate in the society into which it is born, to be able to act deliberately within the social formation, the child must enter into the symbolic order, the set of signifying systems of culture of which the supreme example is language. (60)

As Belsey writes, the "supreme" signifying system is language. Silverman expresses the same idea in this way: "For Lacan, as for Barthes, language mediates all other signifiers" (165). A subject defines itself through language.

This concept of the Other is explained in part in the following quotation from Malcolm Bowie's analysis of Lacan's model:

More consistently than any other of Lacan's terms 'the Other' refuses to yield to a single sense, in each of its incarnations it is that which introduces 'lack' or gap into the operations of the subject and which, in doing so, incapacitates the subject for selfhood . . . . (134)

Identity, as constructed by language, is necessarily connected to the cultural code. As Silverman writes:

With the subject's entry into the symbolic order it is reduced to the status of a signifier in the field of the Other. It is defined by a linguistic structure which does not in any way address its being, but which determines its entire cultural existence. (166)

As Silverman explains: "Lacan indicates that the subject's desires are manufactured for it. The factory--the site of production--is the symbolic" (178). This desire for 'the Other' is manufactured and articulated through language: the "supreme example" (Belsey 60) of "the symbolic order, the set of signifying systems of culture" (Belsey 60).

Lacan takes this analogy between language and the structural gridwork of the family even further: he "suggests a close affinity--indeed a virtual collaboration--between the structuring agency of the family and that of the signifier" (Silverman 180). The family is "a set of symbolic relations which always transcend the actual persons who are defined by means of them" (Silverman 182). The entire family network is defined solely by its relations to its own members; it is a "closed system of signification" (Silverman 182). As Belsey explains: "Identity', subjectivity, is thus a matrix of subject positions" (61). A subject establishes its own subjective identity within language and the closed symbolic register of the family.

As a teenager, Gallant spent several years with "an American psychiatrist who helped to raise her. He had been an assistant to Sigmund Freud and had been analyzed by him" (Grant 27). In an interview with Geoff Hancock, Gallant, referring to her years in this man's home, says, "the library was there, you know, so I read a lot. And I went through a period when that was gospel. It was almost like a code, until, well, you know, you get older and that's that" (Grant 27-28). Gallant discounts the importance of Freudian psychology to her adult way of thinking, but the knowledge is present and may exert a subconscious influence on her writing.

See Belsey, pages 70-76, for a more detailed explanation of closure.

See the quotation from Lodge on page 50 for a list of authors who endorse the effacement of the author from the text.

See D. B. Jewison's discussion of the ghost in Jean's room, from "Speaking of Mirrors," page 103, and Neil Besner's discussion of the significance of the ghosts in The Light of Imagination, page 32.

See Besner's analysis of this narrative tactic on pages 30-31 of The Light of Imagination.

The section concludes "the formulation of the enigma" (Silverman 260), Barthes's third division in the hermeneutic code. The enigmas surrounding both Jean and Isobel have been formulated for the reader; however, as Silverman explains, "[t]he formulation receives frequent supplementations as the larger narrative progresses" (Silverman 260). Clues about the dual enigmas in the text are scattered throughout the text itself.

The fourth division of the hermeneutic code, the "request for an answer" (Silverman 260) is not present in "Its Image on the Mirror" as the novella is structured as a monologue by the narrator, Jean Price.

I am indebted to Dr. Fedderson's analysis of this example of jamming.

See footnote #3 for chapter two for a discussion of Jewison's argument.

The term "de-constructed" refers specifically to Belsey's definition of deconstruction: the identification of the polyphony of a text. Gallant's construction and deconstruction of German culture in "The Pegnitz Junction" exposes a plurality of meaning (the identifying mark of a writerly text). The reader's task is to identify this polyphony.

Barthes lists four other categories of received knowledge in the cultural code: "an Outline of Practical Medicine . . . a Logic . . . a Rhetoric . . . and an anthology of maxims and proverbs" (S/Z 205-206). I have not included these four categories as most of them are irrelevant to my discussion of the cultural code in "The Pegnitz Junction." The topic of medicine is not discussed in the novella. A discussion of logic, i.e. a discussion of syllogisms (see Barthes' categorization of this division), seems impractical for modern readers. A discussion of rhetoric would necessarily seem to be a part of the thesis as a whole, concerned, as it is, with the writerly elements of Gallant's fiction. For readers interested in the effects of rhetoric in the novella, the focus of Neil Besner's critical work, The Light of Imagination: Mavis Gallant's Fiction, is, as Barbara Godard states, "on the effects of rhetoric" (77). I have not included an analysis of an "anthology of maxims and proverbs" because: a) a discussion of some maxims and proverbs is touched upon within the context of other sections (for example, the section on art contains an analysis of the "myth of German womanhood"); and b) because of a lack of material. One interesting section which I could not include was Frau Schneider's analysis of one of her husband's proverbs.

My husband said that if the President go in for a Fourth Term he would jump in deep water. That was an expression they used for suicide where he came from, because they had a world-famous trout stream. Not deep, though. Where he came from everybody was too poor to buy rope, so they said the thing about jumping. That was all the saying amounted to. (41)

Gallant says, in her interview with Geoff Hancock:

When the young woman [Christine] hears the older woman thinking about her life in America, she really does hear her thinking. She is not inventing or making up stories. . . . She really does know all these stories. She really does know what has happened to everyone. Someone wondered if she was schizophrenic. No. There is a German expression, "I can hear him thinking." I've always liked that. (65)

This quotation and all further references to "The Pegnitz Junction" are from Mavis Gallant's The Pegnitz Junction.

See the section on ethics for a further discussion on the significance of Bonhoeffer's works to the novella.

See Grant's discussion (page 62) on the reception of Gallant's work.

The journey motif in "The Pegnitz Junction" makes the literary parody of The Castle apparent, as does the subtext of the German family's excursion to the museum-castle. I have included a brief analysis of a possible parody of Death in Venice in "The Pegnitz Junction" because of Gallant's comments about Mann's work in her interview with Hancock (see page 87).

See the section on ethics for a discussion of the Christian references in "The Pegnitz Junction" and the ways in which the literary metaphor of life as a (Christian) journey is deconstructed.

See the sections on the history of Europe (page 106-107), ethics (page 115), and the semic code (pages 133-134) in "The Pegnitz Junction" for analyses of Herbert's imagined letters of protest.

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The photographer is wearing "his tartan waistcoat with George-the-Fourth buttons, his cream corduroy jacket from Rome, . . . an American peace emblem on a chain, dark-green shorts [the German contribution?], Japanese sandals, and, because the sandals pinched, a pair of brown socks" (66). When the photographer points out a statue to his wife and says "'There, the ideal--classic, esthetic,' and so forth" (66), the wife makes the comment, "told her mother later and they had a good laugh" (66).

1

Ronald Hatch, interpreting the question in a slightly different form, states: "It is no longer enough to ask why civilization, in its traditional forms of philosophy, art, and religion, failed to hold fast against the Nazis. Gallant now asks if civilization itself is not the culprit" ("Fascism" 34)



.2

I am indebted to both Besner and Keefer's analyses for my own examination of the re-emergence of events from the Second World War in the events of "The Pegnitz Junction."

.3

Gallant does not actually write that "this was like the war"; however, the educated reader can draw the parallels.

.4

I am indebted to Keefer for this connection.

.5

In the interview with Hancock, Gallant speaks about her first exposure to the pictures from the concentration camps:

One thing you truly cannot imagine was what the first concentration camp pictures were for someone my age. That's something you can't imagine because you've seen them all your life. . . . When the first pictures arrived in Canada I was twenty-two, working on a newspaper. The pictures I saw had been taken by British and American army photographers. . . . I was to write what went under the pictures, and a little information of 750 words. . . .

Now, imagine being twenty-two, being the intensely left-wing 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 [Gallant's emphasis] of something I did not myself understand. I thought, "There must be no descriptive words in this, no adjectives. Nothing like 'horror', 'horrifying' because what the pictures are saying is stronger and louder. It must be kept simple. (39)

Gallant's write-up was not used by the newspaper.

.6

Janice Kulyk Keefer calls this strategy postmodern. She writes:

It is in a piece such as 'The Pegnitz Junction' that Gallant's postmodernist affiliations assert themselves most strongly and, by corollary, most problematically. Discontinuity, obliquity, even opacity--these are not strategies to arrive at or legitimize a meaning that was there all along, either in the text or in the experience it represents. Rather, they are narrative equivalents of Gallant's refusal to put descriptive captions under the pictures of Auschwitz and to write an explanatory text. (172)

7

Irvine quotes Hatch in her chapter entitled "Maternal Vitality in Gallant's Fiction" in Sub/Version:

In some ways Christine is the exemplum of modern woman, in that, while engaged to a theology student, she is also the lover of Herbert, the engineer. She cannot make up her mind whether to embrace religion, with its metaphysical solace, or applied science, with its manipulation of present-day reality. (134)

Irvine makes the point that Hatch's comments could apply to both men and women.

8

The four conscripts are:

Dietchen Klingebiel, who later became a failed priest; Ferdinandchen Mickefett, who was to open the first chic drug-store at Wuppertal; Peter Sutitt, arrested for doping race-horses in Ireland; and Fritz Forster, who was sent to Africa to count giraffes for the United Nations and became a mercenary. (42)

9

Besner, after commenting on Herbert's passive response to the French porter's attack, writes:

But Christine, born after the war, has inherited a different attitude, and her own reaction, ineffective though it may be, is both articulate and vehement; she tells the porter he is a "filthy little swine of a dog of a bully" (7). (85)

One could argue that Herbert's delayed reaction--i.e. his statement that he intends "to write to the Guide Michelin and the Tourist Office" (8), an intention which he repeats--is equally articulate and less inflammatory. However, the reader soon realizes that Herbert's reaction is always to write a letter, regardless of the situation. As Besner writes, "we realize that Herbert's style is to conform amiably, to maintain the status quo no matter how severely provoked" (87).

1

Ronald Hatch, Lawrence Matthews, Barbara Godard, and George Woodcock all mention the strong element of realism in Gallant's work. Hatch writes that "Certainly Gallant is a 'realist' writer, but obviously her handling of narrative structures takes her well beyond any simplistic notion of realism" ("Three" 99). Matthews speaks of the "world of concrete, sensory realism" (160) in the stories in From the Fifteenth District; Godard classifies Gallant's "early work in the mode of psychological realism" (75). Woodcock writes of "that special Gallant realism [my emphasis] where the web of memory provides the mental links that make for plausibility" (86).

Critics who classify Gallant's work as modernism include Carol Howells, Robertson Davies, and Judith Skelton Grant. Howells writes that "modernism is an important feature in Gallant's fictions of displacement" (92). Robertson Davies, in his article "The Novels of Mavis Gallant," agrees with this classification and places Gallant's work "in the modern mode" (69). Grant notes that Gallant's "mode, as John Metcalf points out in 'The Curate's Egg,' is the modern short story" (31).

"The Pegnitz Junction" escapes both of the above classifications. Godard classifies it as postmodernism; Woodcock says that the "The Pegnitz Junction" is "the most experimental of Gallant's works" (86).

2

Grant mentions the "split between reviewers who feel Gallant's stories confront the reader with difficult, complex moral issues and those who are disturbed to find her work emotionally shallow" (34). In the footnotes to this section, she details the different reactions to Gallant's fictions by the two camps of critics.

3

Several critics have noted the "productive" role of the reader in Gallant's texts. Barbara Godard writes: "That the role of the reader is foregrounded in Gallant's texts should be underlined" (75). Ronald Hatch says of the Linnet Muir stories that "one can sense the act of writing itself becoming a process of participation" ("Three" 113). Robertson Davies comments that Gallant does not make judgemental comments about her characters: "she makes her readers use them, and that is her art. She deploys, displays, exhibits, and leaves the judgements up to us" (70). Winfried Siemerling writes that Gallant's texts, especially her "superb, lingering endings [leave] ample space for uncertainty and work on the reader's part" (136). Thus, the reader becomes a "producer" of the text.

4

Belsey writes: "Deconstruction in order to reconstruct the text as a newly intelligible, plural [my emphasis] object is the work of criticism" (105).

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