

The Vision of History in Mavis Gallant's *The Pegnitz Junction*

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Mavis Gallant is often regarded as the 'outsider' of Canadian literature in her selection of Paris as her home since the 1950s, as well as the topics of her tales. Just as she details the French's idiosyncrasies in collections like *Overhead in a balloon*, the Germans' disturbed post-war psyche is being scrutinized in *The Pegnitz Junction*.

The Pegnitz Junction is often distinguished for its specific treatment of moment and history in the body of Gallant's fiction. The collection developed from the need of Mavis Gallant to uncover the origin of fascism, not as a particular German historical propensity, but, as she puts it, its tiny human opportunities. War rubble and catastrophe are the specific historical awareness to which the stories refer in this compilation. This offers the background of the annihilation and implosion of qualities that surface as a recorded clear in her different accumulations inside The ruins of development, of history itself, that allegedly linear progression of intelligible cause and proportionate impact.

Here the background of speech and the deterministic model of remembrance are embedded as a historical discontinuity in the mirror image of conflict, a breakdown of our self-representation methods. In *The Pegnitz Junction*, memory distortion, its lapses and repressions discover a palpable floor for exposure. The collective German memory is at stake, reinforcing the individual struggle of the protagonists with their past.

The title tale is the only one in which Gallant uses an openly post-modernist narrative framework through which consciousness becomes a fluid medium itself. It opens with a scene in a Paris hotel room where Christine, a youthful German woman associated with religious philosophy, has recently gone through seven days' vacation with her separated from darling Herbert and his little child Bert. The already floundering holiday finishes in disaster when the Germanophobe porter expels the threesome from the hotel and is compelled to go back by train due to an airport strike. The story traces the phases of their trip from Paris to the junction of Pegnitz where the pair will go their distinct ways, the reader surmises.

The trip can thus be viewed thematically as a life metaphor, for this situation one wherein correspondence slacks and missed associations run apace with the individuals who plague the adventure itself. It is likewise a representative improving of the past through the plains of German history, and this cultural consciousness finds voice in several episodes that challenge Germany's liberal progressive alternatives to its identity dilemma. This private and collective itinerary paradigm is time-honored as a structuring property that defines decision and direction. A causal agent reflected as a temporary car in the train trip; a microcosmic register of beginning and ending, stop and start, and movement. Within this frame of the trip as a moment metaphor itself, the narrative opens up to various chronologies through Christine

who acts as a vector for the stories of the 'mind' of the other travelers. These forays into the areas of inner procedures begin with a note of conflict between the particular impression of truth of Christine and Herbert.

If Herbert's water purification scheme posits the past metaphorically as a controlled dismissal scheme, Christine considers the flow of time as erratic and fleeting, dependent on the moment seized and disclosed in a pattern of experience for consistency. His data is the controlled experiment laboratory, hers is the free story playing in the mind. The life of the old German lady as an emigrant before and during the war in the United States and her subsequent return to Germany is related in the first person, but it is an unknown 'I,' a narrator drained with subjective intention and motivation. In the tale, it is uncertain whether.

Christine imagines situations all over her kindred travelers, or whether account streams actually from them in a voice free from the limitations of aligning them with a fundamental unified point of view. These intra-conscious predictions peruse like direct discourse, with a vocal quality that owes nothing to a mind's monological meanderings that the reader is meant to capture unconsciously, tuned in to itself. Rather, the opposite. Their chronology is not the fragmented pulsation of introspection, but the ordered flow of dates and times that appear to be even more concrete for the use of historical events that collude with the reader's own references. Who are these narratives addressed to? If Christine represents them at plot point, it's not her voice that's heard, but a disembodied source's voice. This has the impact of setting distinct rates and tones of tone within the text, and the incorporeal value thrust the story into 'uncanniness' the surface of familiar yet unfamiliar interpretation components. As Heather Murray calls attention to, in case of "*The Pegnitz Junction*," the entire story is an uncanny contextual investigation as the plot is collapsed into the ghostly consciousness of the whole German population. Inevitably 'Reading' here travels through inexplicable strands of repressed history. Gallant utilizes a favorite method of 'floating' the focal point of discourse acts all through the story, wherein an evidently outer storyteller shows himself to be the mouthpiece of Christine's inner voice. As in a passage when the carriages are passed by a ticket inspector:

'No standing in first class!' This voice, growing louder and nearer, was so comically Bavarian that even the two adults had to laugh, though more discreetly than the children, who were simply doubled over. (PJ, p. 20)

This is the hic and nunc of the narrative-line where the stagnating threads of communication between the couple and the child are pitted against various modes of self-questioning and reflection which, even if not directly addressed to us, imply our presence as the earliest closest to the narration. Thus we have the paradox of subtexts that have every one of the trappings of narrative authenticity where the grouping of occasions is foremost to its lucidness, and in which order is an uninterrupted movement of regular chronology, while the present is shown to be all hesitation and indecision. In the event of the ancient German lady sitting opposite Christine, her identity is described by the lists of cooked and eaten dishes, indicating changes in the lifestyle of a nation of exile, and her alienated position is the aspect that forges connections with the other lifestyles:

I cooked around seventeen thousand suppers, all told. Never a disagreement. Never an angry word. Nothing but good food and family loyalty. I cooked fresh chicken soup, pea soup with bacon, my

own goulash soup, hot beer soup, soup with dumplings, soup with rice, soup with noodles, prepared my own cabbage in brine, made fresh celery salad, potato salad our way,... (PJ, p.24)

Thus we are told ironically, although time goes on, the voices of those who are unable to break through the war period screen are left to retreat continuously. The very rupture placed in this tale by the narrative form relegates the characters to a land of immobile ghost separated from the present.

On the point of 'true' moment, that of the story current, lapses and gaps, intermittent narrative clock strokes contrasts with the overt pacing and tightly-knit workings of the other-worldly temporalities. The three main characters are embarked on a journey in which they are subjected to disruption, their itinerary has made chaotic and the passive victims of unplanned changes themselves. The surprises along the way are all unpleasant ones, in which reality's demands run counter to their excellent intentions. In a scenario governed by chance and opportunity, Herbert's exacerbated sense of reality demonstrates insufficient and little Bert is gradually absorbed in his own fantasy land built around a sponge called Bruno. It is exactly the failure of the couple to create 'story' content together on the degree of the story string of time that opens these holes to the attacking powers of data from other life and other times. The ghosts of this past, encoded as 'interference' are unable to feed into history and the past.

As the narrative progresses, taking with it the unsuccessful continuum of the private sequence of the couple, thus intruding and interfering with their fissured narrative present. Christine, therefore, is increasingly declaring herself on the line of fault between her very own fate and a reflector reflecting a verifiable infringement; the dull drapery of the previous conflict. But she is also capable of fabulating; transforming herself into an indeterminate region of meaning that evades realism. One such example is when, looking past the landscape, she takes the reader on a trip to a castle with an eccentric family group in a gothic tale of Uncle Ludwig and his henchman Jurgen. It is evident that in reality only a few minutes have passed between Christine seeing the castle and it disappears out of sight, yet the moments between them are elastic, extending into dynasties and shrinking back to minutes when temporal order is restored. Thus what constitutes a moment of narrating time provides way to an extended chronology of tale like a split opened in the present's bedrock, exposing worlds below like a dream, and then closing again as if they had never been. The messages in a document that composes "*The Pegnitz Junction*" are not instants from a life that reveals a semi-significant incident of that life, but voices from the past that the method of Gallazit has brought into the present, unmediated. Seeing "*The Pegnitz Junction*" as a social remark on the failure of contemporary life to provide significant frameworks of situation based on previous lessons would seem logical. But we could also call it a story about and around story-telling, in which the stories that plunder Christine's narrative space not only stop her from speaking, but also propel her to the intersection where she does, finally discover the start of the continuation of the story started before.

The Pegnitz Junction, It is true that the historical and cultural contexts are very distinct, because while *The Pegnitz Junction* speaks to the trauma of post-war Germany, this paper aimed at shedding light on the problematization of roots at the core of Gallant's job in crossing limits of context and chronology. A rift

or discontinuity tells both "*The Pegnitz Junction*" and "Voices Lost in Snow" as a loss of a historicized voice, person or collective, predicting types of ideological colonization and communication breakdown.

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