

ECHOES OF ENTRAPMENT

ECHOES OF ENTRAPMENT: AESTHETIC REPRESENTATION AND
RESPONSIBILITY IN MAVIS GALLANT'S "THE PEGNITZ JUNCTION"

By

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ABSTRACT

Over seventy years after the fallout of the Nazi genocide, depicting the Shoah continues to serve as a subject of widespread debate. Balancing the aesthetics of representation with historical accountability poses unique challenges to both readers and writers of Holocaust literature. In its extensive considerations of time and place, in its troubling of the conventional limitations of the Canadian novel, and in its suggestive possibilities both inside and outside of the ethnic mainstream, the genre is one of ample opportunity — a prospect that entails enormous responsibility.

The difficulty of finding the appropriate language to represent the horrors of the Shoah is the central subject of this thesis, which focuses on interpretive responsibility in Mavis Gallant's "The Pegnitz Junction" (1973). It situates the novella in both a theoretical and Canadian literary context, examines Gallant's understanding of the ethics of aestheticizing the event, provides a full-length study of the story, and attempts to fill some of the gaps in critical scholarship by drawing attention to the multidimensionality of the text's portrayal of a post-Auschwitz world. I look closely at how Gallant's work prompts a suspension of logic and normalcy, and in turn reconceptualizes the novella insofar as its *indirection* causes her readership to contemplate whether Holocaust responsibility is, in the words of D.G. Myers, "to be shared by [readers], despite the fact that they are not to blame" (270). I suggest that the novella is a medium in which refusal to provide logical explanations for the Holocaust through aesthetic representation not only allows audiences to ponder the implications of humanity's capacity to preserve and erase historical memory, but also causes them to consider how human beings ought to respond responsibly to the ramifications of historical trauma.

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En quel honneur?

INTRODUCTION

Background, Gallant in Context, and Conceptualizing Accountability

“The horror of the Holocaust is not that it deviated from human norms; the horror is that it didn’t. What happened may happen again, to others not necessarily Jews, perpetrated by others, not necessarily Germans. We are all possible victims, possible perpetrators, possible bystanders.”

— Yehuda Bauer

In the early 1940s, Mavis Gallant, then a reporter for *The Montreal Standard*, was asked by her editors to write captions for photographs supplied of Nazi concentration camps. Appalled by the substance of the images — which had hitherto been largely unpublished in Canada — but nevertheless troubled by the capacity for sensationalism that underlined her superiors' request, Gallant worried about the inherent risk of 'captioning' such atrocities. Recounting her predicament in an interview with Geoff Hancock, Gallant argued that the images ought to have spoken for themselves:

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* 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.' (99)

Indeed, Gallant's awareness of language's ability to trivialize the complexities surrounding the origins and outcome of the Holocaust permeated her approach to writing about the Shoah. Interested in the fundamental linkages between the roots of fascism and "its small possibilities in people," (Hancock 100) Gallant travelled to Germany in the 1960s to explore, firsthand, the question of how the Holocaust became a reality in the very culture that she had always held in the highest regard. Her answer would come in the form of *The Pegnitz Junction*

(1973) — a collection of stories centred on a twofold sense of responsibility: reflecting, on the one hand, Gallant’s personal struggles to write about Holocaust, while on the other inviting readers to examine the event in an attentive and ethically accountable manner.

Among Gallant’s critics, the title story is perceived as her most complicated body of writing. One of the many creative results of her attempts to ponder “the foundations of civilization” in a post-Holocaust world, Gallant’s work combines the story of a young German woman’s train ride from Paris to Pegnitz alongside her lover and his son with a number of intertexts — each of which disrupts the novella’s overarching narrative, and in turn decentres readers (Schaub 26-27). Instead of documenting the horrors of the Holocaust, Gallant’s anarchic manipulations of time and memory allow her to experiment with the dynamic between structure and subject matter. This experimentation prompts readers to consider how the text’s surrealistic style and substance are in balance, which according to Lesley D. Clement exemplifies a “harmonious equilibrium of form and content” (75). Through challenging readers’ inclination toward obtaining logical connections, the novella serves as a reinvention, achieving *indirection* in responding aesthetically to the Shoah — an event that defies logical rationale.

Gallant In Context

“The Pegnitz Junction” was one of a number of publications that reflected a more general aesthetic shift in Canadian literature, as prose fiction of the mid sixties and early seventies troubled the conventional boundaries of written

discourse. Prior to this rise in experimentation, Canadian novels almost always took the form of linear stories, as authors favoured a digressive prose that married a comprehensible plot with a rewarding degree of closure (Hyman 15). To analyze Canadian fiction published prior to the fifties through a critique of aesthetic structure would, in the words of George Woodcock, “have been an act of supererogation” (Woodcock 29) — a statement that is further echoed by Roger Hyman, who maintains that most critically acclaimed writers constructed representational novels that were “easily read and understood, and with symbols which were publicly accessible” (Hyman 13-14).

While testing the traditional limits of the novel remained an underdeveloped practice, certain fiction of the fifties saw increased gestures toward the emerging genre of Canadian Holocaust literature. The early work of Mordecai Richler, in particular, was known for its incorporation of scenes in which ex-Nazis were rebuked under both satiric and serious circumstances (Kremer 137). The primary antagonist of his first published novel, *The Acrobats* (1954), is one such figure — a former German SS officer named Roger Kraus, whose looming whereabouts threaten Canadian painter André Bennett over the course of the story. Kraus’s shadowing of Bennett highlights the expansiveness of Hitler’s doctrine of fascism, just as his presence in Francisco Franco’s Valencia in 1954 underscores the degree to which Nazism continued to corrupt Europe in the years that followed the Second World War. The threat of the Nazis is also a staple of *A Choice of Enemies* (1957), wherein Richler channels anxieties surrounding

fascist indoctrination through the figure of Ernst Haupt. Both a member of the Free German Youth (FDJ) and the Hitler Youth, Ernst is consumed by Nazi ideology: “There is no right or wrong. There are conditions, rewards, punishments, and sides, but that’s all” (Richler 129). Ernst is unable to consider issues of morality in conjunction with politics, and in portraying him this way Richler invites readers to question humanity’s ability to succumb to destructive ideologies — the underlying roots of which risk marrying fascist beliefs with a directive for violence (Cockerton 40).

Despite the fact that metaphor was a recurring feature of Richler’s prose, the structural form of his novels, nevertheless, was relatively conventional in nature. A challenge to standard practices of linear writing that enveloped much of the work of the fifties arose with the publication of A.M. Klein’s *The Second Scroll* (1951), which places the ramifications of the Holocaust at the focal point of its attempts to grapple with the dynamic figured “between a Messianic vision of God and Jewish history” (Hyman 9). Klein’s prose shattered accepted practices of literary style, in that it combined intensely connotative language with intertextual religious and mythic frameworks so as to offer the novel as a medium through which aesthetic form is not subservient to content. The five ‘books’ that make up the novel combine poetics with historical reconstruction to tell the story of a young Jewish writer from Montréal, whose journey to the state of Israel in the name of finding his uncle, Holocaust survivor Melech Davidson, “bear[s] both direct and indirect witness” to the horrors of the Shoah (Kremer 148). Appended

to each of the novel's 'books' are poetic "glosses" — three written by Melech and two from the narrator — which allow the novel's structure to mirror "the fundamental Jewish dialectic between Pentateuch and Commentaries" (Hyman 16-17).

As is the case with "The Pegnitz Junction," *The Second Scroll's* rumination on the Shoah resists extensive engagement with contextualization. While Holocaust imagery lies at the central root of much of the novel, its particulars occupy a limited set of pages, each of which "deal[s] with it indirectly or in hindsight" (Hyman 38). The section entitled "Gloss Gimel" serves as the novel's most direct confrontation with the specifics of the depravity. An excerpt from one of Melech's letters, the passage begins with detailing his progression along the corridors leading up to the Sistine Chapel — a journey that leads to a series of interrogations. Entering into a visual representation of the centre of the Christian world, Melech's writing links Michelangelo's depictions of the gorgeous human form to the horrors inflicted upon the human body by the Nazis, as he renders "the flights of athletes above me" a symbolic signifier of "the *relictæ* of the camps, entire cairns of cadavers, heaped and golgotha'd" (Klein 140). Seeing such "inverted images of the Holocaust" ultimately allows Melech to place Christian art and power in conjunction with the legacy of the Shoah (Hyman 110-11) — an idea that underlies his description of Michelangelo's representation of landscape:

It is not a paradise from which he shows expulsion: no flowers spring from the earth, no lush vegetation, no crystal streams; it is a landscape infertile of barren soil and unyielding rock where no thing grows save the malefic tree on which hermaphrodite evil sits and loves itself. It is the landscape of our life on earth; no Eden, but the little to which we cling. Yet even from this little my generation was cut off. (Klein 143-44)

In meshing the lack of “expulsion” that constitutes Michelangelo’s “paradise” with the way in which the Holocaust rendered Jews “cut off,” (Klein 143-44) Melech suggests that the inherent promise of the traditional Christian narrative cannot be fulfilled.¹ Through the lens of Melech, Klein channels his pervasive sense of awareness that the Holocaust is part of a larger history of destruction, as “the landscape of our life on earth” is the very land on which insufferable trauma is impressed upon those that are “cut off” from prophetic visions (Klein 144). By connecting the images of Michelangelo’s ceiling with the atrocities of the Nazi genocide, “Gloss Gimel” serves as the medium through which Klein showcases continuities of exile and return, oppression, and racialization, as he offers both a “re-membering” of his people and a reestablishment of Judaic epistemologies (Hyman 11).

Although Canadian Holocaust fiction of the sixties would not offer structural and thematic difficulties comparable to the aesthetic obstacles that

¹ Gallant addresses the tension between Jewish and Christian views of futurity through her treatment of a collection of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s essays. His acceptance and embrace of supersessionism — and the implications of this belief for Gallant’s novella — shall be further dealt with in Chapter Three.

Klein had provided a generation prior, much of the ensuing literature posed challenges to traditional applications of language discourse. The writing of Leonard Cohen is the closest exception to this trend, as his highly poetic and allusive style reflects the layered nature of Klein's prose. Having previously experimented with echoing the horrors of the Shoah in his first book, *The Favourite Game* (1963), and in his third collection of poetry, *Flowers for Hitler* (1964) — in which he controversially regards Adolf Hitler as a subject — Cohen's second and final novel, *Beautiful Losers* (1966), entails poetic and thematic experimentations that disrupt readers' understanding of the traditional boundaries of storytelling. Absent from the novel are issues that Cohen had drawn upon in previous writings, as no mention is made of Jewish images, and the Jewish experience in Montréal — a recurring subject in *The Favourite Game* — is only satirically referenced at the end of the text (Ravvin 23). Nevertheless, to argue that the book is not about Jewishness is to ignore the segment depicting a brief but squalid encounter with Hitler that is riddled with interpretive possibilities regarding the roots of the Holocaust. Through "ecstatic and intensely poetic language play," (Hyman 16) Hitler emerges toward the end of the novel dressed as a hotel waiter, and directs "sordid exciting commands" (Cohen 182) to the unnamed narrator's wife, Edith, and her mystical mentor, F. Noting that they "hardly cared to resist" the waiter's demands over the course of their sexual escapade — the conclusion of which is marked by Hitler's declaration that, "I had millions of these at my disposal" as he dries their "parts" — F. offers a concerning

thought, as he remarks, “You see, I have shown you *how it happens*, from style to style, from kiss to kiss” (Cohen 182). Despite its troubling undertone, F.’s remark is telling, as the passion that underlines the lovers’ tryst with Hitler reflects the structural forces that informed Europe’s dangerous experimentation with Nazi ideology. A reflective “parable of contemporary political complicity,” F.’s and Edith’s illicit encounter with Hitler suggests that a capacity “to capitulate or even participate in the worst extremes of political violence” (Ravvin 29) exists even among individuals that demonstrate sociopolitical consciousness. Through marrying allusive references to the Nazi genocide with linkages to characters that garner readers’ sympathy, Cohen prompts his readership to consider the implications of submitting to belief systems that are capable of ushering forward political violence, which in turn underscores the degree of responsibility that is central to figuring social awareness.

While the Holocaust’s “shadowy and abrupt appearance” (Ravvin 28) through highly figurative language in *Beautiful Losers* is a subject of both praise and censure among literary theorists — a critique that, as we will see, is also directed toward Gallant, insofar as florid references to the Shoah strain the edges of obscuring the atrocities imposed upon its victims — the exchange with Hitler allows Cohen to rupture any sense of the novel’s linearity. The practice of grappling with the event through “concentrated but limited engagement” (Hyman 39) was not unique to Cohen or Klein, but alternatively served as a feature of some of the most thoughtful fiction to emerge in the mid to late sixties — an

example of which is Henry Kreisel's *The Betrayal* (1964), wherein the specifics of the Holocaust occupy just two of the novel's chapters (Hyman 39). Although it is constructed in an aesthetically conservative manner — the text is written in the first person with language that is easily comprehensible, which leaves readers untroubled by issues of technical structure — the novel's brief engagements with narrative disruptions invite Kreisel's readership to consider the long-standing consequences of the Holocaust and its implications for memory. The Holocaust makes its first and only appearance in the novel when Theodore Stappler recalls the imagery that underlines recurring dreams (62-63) of his late mother who perished in a Nazi concentration camp, but its ramifications continue to loom large over characters and readers respectively. Through employing surrealistic nightmares as the primary avenue through which the horrors of the Shoah are depicted, Kreisel's representation of the Holocaust is comparable to the multilayered levels of a labyrinth: Stappler's mother is forever reduced to a mere memory — marked, in part, by his recognition that, "In the dream she never talked" (63) — which in turn decentres readers, who are only able to ponder the effects of the Nazi genocide when afforded a window into Stappler's reality.

The "shattering impact" of Stappler's direct confrontation of the Holocaust over the course of just twenty-five pages (Hyman 39) reflects Kreisel's concerted — albeit restricted — attempt to negotiate the dynamic figured between trauma and memory. The degree to which similar distancing is achieved in other Canadian Holocaust fiction is often a result of the way in which authors trouble

“temporal or spatial” senses of linearity (Hyman 39). Phyllis Gotlieb’s *Why Should I Have All the Grief?* (1969), for instance, takes place in Toronto many years after the conclusion of the Second World War, thus embedding the horrors of the past in the particulars of the present, as Holocaust survivor Zevi Dorfman’s struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder highlights both the universalization of the Shoah and the threat of its shadow in a post-Auschwitz world. Primarily a science-fiction writer, Gotlieb intentionally strains the edges of an aesthetic tightrope in her depiction of postwar Canada, as the repetition of vicious anti-Semitic tropes — the most recurring example of which being Jewish characters’ constant concern for money — is a channel wherein readers are left to ponder the difficulties of Jewish life despite being removed from the distant past. Mordecai Richler’s *St. Urbain’s Horseman* (1971) also relies on a sense of detachment of time and place in order to resist direct imaginative confrontation of the Holocaust. Set in London, Montreal, and Israel in the late sixties, the novel’s protagonist, Jake Hersh, grapples with the mystique surrounding his long-lost cousin, Joey, who formerly fought in the Spanish Civil War and is a known hunter of Nazi war criminals. By constructing much of the novel around Jake’s obsession with the absence of his “moral editor,” (311) Richler also balances on a representative tightrope, inviting readers to consider “the heroic urgings of the soul” (Cockerton 105) in such a way that prompts an honest degree of self-examination. Only when the promise of Joey’s heroics is taken away at the moment in which Jake learns of his death does Richler’s protagonist confront the

sobering nature of reality. As a result, readers are left to ponder the inherent responsibility that underlines Jake's constant "fluctuat[ion] between acceptance of what he has and the desire to ride the ideal" (Cockerton 105).

The level of responsibility that writers undertake when attempting to balance the ethical implications of aesthetic representation with the appropriate language to address an event as unimaginable as the Shoah is a subject of scrutiny in Holocaust literature. As we shall see, part of Gallant's "pervasive historical sense" (Keefer 163) lies in her ability to engage with the Holocaust in a way that does not look to overarching political systems for explicit answers about the ideological origins of Nazism (Toye). Rather, the brilliance of "The Pegnitz Junction" is rooted in its capacity to interrogate "every day living" for "the origin of the worm — the worm that destroyed the structure" (Schaub 26).

The decades that followed the sixties and seventies saw authors of Holocaust fiction increasingly challenge linear writing in a manner that both compared to and expanded beyond Gallant's reconceptualization of the conventional story, as they sought to not only push the limits of traditional narrative structures, but to also deviate from discourses about the "ethnic mainstream" (Hyman 14). Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981) delves into the sociopolitical effects of Japanese internment and the often under-discussed ramifications of Japanese Canadians' experiences with racialization both during and after the Second World War. Through the lens of Naomi Nakane — a teacher living in postwar Cecil, Alberta — readers are presented with a revisitation of the

past that reconceptualizes the present. The protagonist's visit to her aunt prompts a sense of self-examination that deals with the aftermath of Japanese Canadians' imprisonment. Kogawa's diction is riddled with connotative language — the suggestive possibilities of which reflect the ways that echoes of the Holocaust continue to run rampant in Canadian life. Such symbolic subtlety underlines textual representations of colour — a factor that is particularly apparent when the children play a game entitled *Yellow Peril*. The narrator realizes that “[t]o be yellow in the *Yellow Peril* game is to be weak and small. Yellow is to be chicken. I am not yellow” (Kogawa 152). Through Naomi's recognition that ‘being yellow’ is the avenue through which she is susceptible to being rendered an “enemy other,” (Nadler 43) Kogawa mirrors reality, as the other children's ability to “know the difference” (Kogawa 84) between themselves and their non-white counterparts is reflective of the more general threat that Japanese Canadians faced in the context of imagined communities. By reminding readers of the linkages between processes of racialization and the potential byproducts of such fundamentally destructive views — namely Japanese internment — Kogawa channels actualities that existed outside the ethnic mainstream, a practice that mirrors Gallant's attempts to search for fascism's underlying roots in the every day.

While questions of representative accountability are increasingly contemplated in spaces outside of the ethnic mainstream, the poetics of Holocaust writing continues to be a topic of intense debate, as figurative gestures

to the event challenge an ethically responsible portrayal of the past. Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces* (1996) is central to this discourse, in that the novel's depiction of "survival of a very specific kind based on redemption" (Oshman 5) risks obscuring the darkness of the Holocaust. The notion that love has the capacity to triumph amidst the most hopeless situations is a staple of the novel's redemptive possibilities — a factor that is particularly apparent in the relationship between Jakob Beer, a Holocaust survivor, and his second wife, Michaela. Traumatized by the memory — or lack thereof — of the uncertainty surrounding his late sister's fate, Jakob yearns for a level of affection from a partner who does not expect him to merely "begin again" (Michaels 144). He finds mutual understanding in Michaela, who grants her husband something that he has long sought — "[t]he joy of being . . . recognized for the first time" (182). Although this degree of comprehension allows Jakob's redemptive aspirations to flourish — which in turn permit him to be "suffused with peace" (191) — such a representation of Holocaust survival can be seen to risk trivialization because the aesthetic gratification afforded to readers reduces the complexities that underlie actual survivor accounts. But Michaels' book also grapples with the possibility that redemption is not possible in a post-Auschwitz world. Unlike Jakob, whose suffering is a result of his struggle to comprehend the "shadow past" — as he remains "[i]nvisible" (17) to the atrocities of the concentration camps — Ben serves as a firsthand witness to the hardship of his parents, both of whom survived the Holocaust. As such, Ben does not have to imagine the deprivation

that his family endured over the course of the Second World War, which prompts him to turn to romantic relationships as a way of seeking redemption. Yet unlike Jakob, Ben's trysts do not result in any sense of emotional ease — he grows to resent his wife, Naomi, while his liaison with Petra is purely physical in nature. That Ben is left in a state of relative uncertainty at the conclusion of the novel reflects Michaels' attempts to deal with the Holocaust's complexities in a manner that accounts for the multidimensionality of redemption. The lack of clarity surrounding Ben's potential acquisition or loss of salvation complicates readers' understanding of love's capacity to redeem the unredeemable.

Whereas Michaels' novel balances the aesthetics of redemptive survival with unpredictability, Yann Martel's *Beatrice & Virgil* (2010) highlights the dangers that underlie metaphorical depictions of the Holocaust. Employing the lens of animal fabulism, the book portrays the Shoah through an allegorical tale about its titular characters — a monkey (Virgil) and a donkey (Beatrice) — and their ongoing rumination on a crime of which they are victims. A representational substitute for the Holocaust, the animals' contemplation of the crime offers a fundamentally reductionist view of the Nazi genocide, which, as reviewer Sam Munson argues, limits “the evils of the Nazi regime to the realm of the tired, self-satisfied cliché and in doing so exposes its author's graceless cynicism” (Munson). Perhaps the most baffling example of Martel's failure to combine allegorical meaning with responsible engagement lies at the conclusion of the novel in a section entitled “Games for Gustav” (199). Attempting to provide

“another way . . . of talking about the Horrors,” (186) the segment is comprised of thirteen short epigrams — each of which poses hypothetical questions that are not only impossible to answer, but equally offensive in nature.² Lacking any ability to appropriately deliberate the true atrocities imposed upon victims of the Shoah, and instead drawing heavily upon a narrative that is oddly puerile in terms of its structure and subject matter, the text serves as one of the strongest examples of irresponsibility in Holocaust writing — to echo Munson, “[i]t is as ubiquitous as it is treasonous” (Munson).

Toward A Responsible Representation of the Holocaust

As my attempt to place Gallant’s work within a more general context of Canadian Holocaust fiction has shown, the act of balancing the aesthetics of representation with historical accountability in depictions of the Shoah poses unique challenges to both readers and writers of Holocaust literature. In its vast considerations of time and place, in its periodic troubling of the conventional limitations of the Canadian novel, and in its representative capacities both inside and outside of the ethnic mainstream, the genre is one of tremendous opportunity — a prospect that entails enormous responsibility. The difficulty of finding the appropriate language to represent the horrors of the Holocaust is the subject of this thesis, which focuses on interpretive responsibility in “The Pegnitz Junction.” I argue that Gallant’s text prompts a suspension of logic and normalcy, and in

² For example, one of the epigrams reads: “Your daughter is clearly dead. If you step on her head, you can reach higher, where the air is better. Do you step on your daughter’s head?” (207).

turn reconceptualizes the novella insofar as its *indirection* causes her readership to contemplate whether Holocaust responsibility is, in the words of D.G. Myers, “to be shared by [readers], despite the fact that they are not to blame” (270). I look closely at how Gallant’s novella is a medium in which refusal to provide logical explanations for the Holocaust through aesthetic representation not only allows audiences to ponder the implications of humanity’s capacity to preserve and erase historical memory, but also causes them to ask how human beings ought to respond responsibly to historical trauma.

In Chapter One, I situate Gallant’s novella within the framework of literary scholarship by considering the broader ramifications of Theodor W. Adorno’s proclamation that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (34). I explore how his directive is a theoretical basis for questioning the degree of responsibility that writers undertake when attempting to fictionalize the event as non-survivors. To interrogate the idea that, in the words of Berel Lang, “there is a significant relation between the moral implications of the Holocaust and the means of its literary expression,” (1-2) I place Adorno’s remark in relationship to additional arguments over the limits of representation, with particular emphasis on ideas raised by Holocaust scholar James Young. Whereas Adorno’s *Prisms* (1967) raised the initial question of how aesthetic pleasure can be figured when depicting the Holocaust, Young’s *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (1988) introduced nuances to the debate through maintaining that writers have a responsibility to not only portray “the facts,” but

to also employ an appropriate aesthetic framework when dealing with the atrocity (3-4). Considering Young's warning that readers must be mindful of how some Holocaust writers risk trivializing that which they attempt to depict — insofar as “the rhetoricity of their literary medium inadvertently confers a fictiveness onto events themselves” (51) — in conjunction with ideas raised by Adorno and other literary theorists will provide me with a basis upon which I can examine the implications of Gallant's reconceptualization of the novella.

In Chapter Two, I explore Gallant's experimentation with the traditional boundaries of storytelling by closely reading “The Pegnitz Junction”. A full-length study of the text demands the establishment of a framework of responsibility through which that analysis takes place. Closely examining the novella is not to be equated with sleuthing it for logical connections — to suggest that the text is informed by a clear structure would undermine Gallant's attempt to fragment representation in such a way that allows her to “[e]vok[e] numerous sets of voices” (Schaub 27). My analysis, therefore, is undertaken with a degree of distancing, as I do not want to undercut the novella's anarchic nature. Rather, I wager that what allows Gallant's text to raise responsible questions lies in her *refusal* to employ measures of aesthetic representation that are rooted in providing readers with logical explanations, as she instead adopts “layering points of view” so as to illustrate “gaps between what is, what is perceived, and what is said” in discourses surrounding the Holocaust (Schaub 27). Gallant's ability to reestablish conventional expectations of analytical inquiry through refusing to

write, in the words of Janice Kulyk Keefer, “an explanatory text,” (160) invites readers to consider the novella in a way that demands both caution and responsible interpretation. My close reading entails both an analysis of the novella’s primary storyline and an examination of the many intertexts that Gallant employs — the surrealistic inconsistencies of which displace readers, and in turn prompt a reorientation of their thoughts.

How, then, do the complexities of Gallant’s novella fit into debates over representing the Holocaust in an accountable manner? This is the subject of Chapter Three, which addresses not only the underlying points of connection within the text, but also how Gallant’s reconceptualized sense of *indirection* serves as a way of marrying aesthetic representation with the immense task of “respond[ing] adequately or appropriately” to the Shoah (Myers 269). Central to my analysis is exploring what ties “The Pegnitz Junction” together. I evaluate the ways that authority is a focal point in the relationship between the main character, her lover, and his son, so that an ongoing power struggle informs shifting alliances over the course of the story. Moreover, I draw particular attention to the significance of the main character continuously holding a copy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s essays during the train ride — an action that complicates other characters’ attempts to frame alternate realities as a way of coping with the prospect of living in a post-Auschwitz world. Reframing the dynamic between structure and form allows Gallant not to undermine, but to alternatively underscore the ramifications of “rewriting history, human indifference,

segregation, and disconnectedness” (Schaub 90). Consequently, Gallant’s text offers an avenue to grapple with the question of representing the Holocaust, as her novella demands responsible interpretation from both author and reader alike.

CHAPTER ONE

The Ethics of Aesthetic Responsibility in Holocaust Literature

The Holocaust defied words, language, imagination, knowledge. . . . Nobody could understand the misery, the fear, the anguish, the pain, the hunger, the humiliation, the infinite humiliation of a person who was to be the absolute victim. How did I survive one day, one night? How did I see and remain sane, if I remained sane? How was it possible to endure so many nightmares and such despair? To this day, I do not understand. Well, I don't understand many things: the complicity of the spectators, the indulgence of the bystanders, the evil of the killers, the suffering of the victims, the silence of God — I don't understand anything. How can you explain, how can you express what you do not understand?

— Elie Wiesel

On 27 January 2005, listeners of StoryCorps — a podcast dedicated to archiving accounts of diverse experiences — were treated to an episode entitled “The Survivors.” Among stories of individuals who overcame tremendous adversity in the face of “illness, genocide, or war,” was a segment narrated by Debbie Fisher, whose father, Oscar, was an Auschwitz survivor (“StoryCorps 461”). Left to grapple with the implications of living in a post-Holocaust world, Oscar often downplayed the sheer brutality of the Second World War and instead painted a picture of a “kinder, gentler Auschwitz” so as to preserve the innocence of those who loved him (“StoryCorps 461”). Debbie, however, knew that her father’s reflections — or lack thereof — were nothing short of a caring front. When Oscar became gravely ill, Debbie recognized that her time to access his memories of the concentration camp was limited. As such, she asked Oscar to open up about Auschwitz, which in turn prompted a haunting exchange between father and daughter:

‘I [Oscar] keep telling you, as if I’m in a room, go away, stop knocking on the door, I do not want to let you in this room. And yet you keep coming back . . . So I’ll ask you one more time to go away, and if you knock again, I’ll let you in. But if I let you in this room, you will never, ever get out. So, do you want to knock again and come in?’ And I said, ‘Yes, I do, dad.’ And he was crying, and I remember he had covers on his body because he was really skinny and very, very weak. And he kicked all the covers off, as if he was kicking down a door. And he said, ‘Fine. Come in then. Come into a

room that you can never leave. Come in.’ And I said, ‘Can I ask you my questions?’ And he said, ‘You’re in the room. You can ask anything.’ And I asked him everything that I ever wanted to ask. I asked him to tell me the real story. And he did. It was painful, and scary, and sickening. I felt a part of me had died. And he’s right. Once you’re in that room, you can’t get out. It’s always with you. (“StoryCorps 461”)

The overarching sense of difficulty that underlined Oscar’s attempt to recount the horrors of Auschwitz illustrates the unique challenges of discussing the long-standing ramifications of the Nazi genocide. As Debbie’s chilling interaction with her father shows, depicting the Holocaust is comparable to accessing the contents of a locked room. If one is to translate the room’s features into any form of representation, they must negotiate their endeavour by marrying the opportunity at hand with an overwhelming prospect — the ethics of portraying trauma in a responsible manner.

The dilemmas that loom large over Holocaust literature are fundamentally rooted in aesthetic and moral questions. Much like navigating through the passages of a labyrinth, representations of the Nazi genocide prompt readers and writers alike to embark upon a path of wide-ranging difficulties — a process that requires balancing historical accountability with imaginative engagement. For some theorists, Holocaust fiction is so fraught with challenges that the mere question of representation is dispelled of entirely. Critics of this nature are usually quick to employ variations of Theodor W. Adorno’s comment on

Holocaust art — “[n]o poetry after Auschwitz” (Epstein 263) or “[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (Adorno 34) — as rallying points in decrying representations of the event in a post-Auschwitz world. Often missing from such discussions, however, are more nuanced accounts of Adorno’s remark. Irving Howe’s “Writing and the Holocaust,” (1988) for example, suggests that Adorno did not necessarily intend “to prescribe for writers a line of conduct that would threaten their very future as writers” (179). Instead, the chief aim of his discussion of the Shoah was to underscore “the literary risk, the moral peril” of addressing the Holocaust through an artistic framework (179).

Some scholars have pushed this line of inquiry further. John Zilcosky’s “Poetry after Auschwitz? Celan and Adorno Revisited” (2005) places Adorno’s statement in conversation with the poetry of Paul Celan so as to explore the ways in which the work of each respective author has been misunderstood on a historical basis. Through troubling two pervasive ideas — the notion that Adorno’s remark was an attempt to prohibit post-Holocaust art, as well as the belief that Celan’s poetic project was centred on the prospect of “work[ing] to ‘rebut’ Adorno’s ‘ban’” (673) — Zilcosky argues that Adorno’s comment was “*itself poetic*, making use of figurative language” (671). In this view, Adorno’s “Auschwitz” is a synecdoche — a gesture to the broader ramifications of the Nazi genocide — while his reference to “poetry” serves as a metaphor for art and culture more generally (671). As Zilcosky shows, this expressive diction does not aim to forbid poetic discourse, but alternatively problematizes “saccharine

postwar poetry” that sought “to repress and/or retouch the Holocaust” (672). Examining the aforementioned nuances in relation to Adorno’s work, therefore, is central to garnering a better understanding of his efforts to revisit the subject in question. Adorno’s 1966 assertion that “‘it may have been wrong’ to say that ‘no poems can be written after Auschwitz’” was not a repudiation of his initial claim — nor was it a conclusion that he reached solely after reading Celan (673). Rather, to echo Zilcosky, it was Celan and Adorno’s ability to work with one another “tacitly” that allowed the two writers to ponder the limitations of poetic language, and in turn introduce hope for art in a post-Holocaust world (673).

While Adorno’s remark has been susceptible to widespread misinterpretation, much of the theory surrounding the ethical implications of narrative engagement with the Shoah continues to be grounded in discomfort with literary metaphor and its application in language discourse. Berel Lang’s introductory chapter to *Writing and the Holocaust* (1988) captures the uneasiness that operates in both the creation of and reception to artistic attempts at representing the Nazi genocide. Asking readers to consider some of the genre’s underlying issues, Lang writes, “Is the enormity of the Holocaust at all capable of literary representation? And what would be the justification for attempting such representation even if it were possible?” (2). For certain critics, the answer to questions of this nature is that of a directive for silence. George Steiner’s *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman* (1967) expands upon Adorno’s statement by arguing that the Holocaust ought to

be seen as unspeakable, in that “Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason” (53). For Steiner, the fact that language is fundamentally unsound, but is nevertheless regarded as bearing a “humane, rational truth” is especially problematic for writers of fiction in a post-Holocaust world (123). As a result, he asserts that the unspeakable must not be confronted through imaginative engagement, but should instead be grappled with through recognizing silence as a viable alternative, as “the unwritten poem” has the capacity to “spea[k] louder” when words are riddled with falsities (54).

Steiner’s claim that forgiveness can only be figured through a framework of first-hand understanding — that is, “[o]nly those who actually passed through hell, who survived Auschwitz . . . can have the right to forgive” (163) — is a point of concern for other Holocaust theorists. Elie Wiesel’s attempt to imagine the enormous burden impressed upon the final survivor of the Shoah pushes this idea further, as he ruminates on the potential ramifications for language in a world wherein nobody can attest to the experience of bearing direct witness to the horrors of the Nazi genocide (Lewis 160-61).³ Because the death of the last survivor is synonymous with the death of producing access to primary accounts of the Holocaust world, Wiesel renders the event indescribable, in that imaginative

³ Wiesel’s comments were uttered in an interview conducted by the CBC. Describing the prospect of a world of no survivors as “the obsession that is haunting us,” Wiesel states, “I am afraid of that survivor, of his vision. I’m afraid of the madness that would invade him, weigh upon him, to have so much knowledge and to know that, with him, all this knowledge will go down, will go out. I do not know what will happen, but am terribly pessimistic with regard to the future of humanity” (Lewis 160-61).

engagement is merely “a mystical language, and that language is shrouded in silence” (Lewis 155). In Wiesel’s view, Adorno’s remark extends beyond the notion that artistic representations risk obscuring the atrocities that underlined the Shoah. Rather, Wiesel asks readers to ponder the sheer difficulty of confronting the Holocaust’s overarching consequences — the implications of which he perceives as inexpressible (Lewis 154).

Adorno, Steiner, and Wiesel’s comments on “the nature (or non-nature) of Holocaust literature” (Hyman 41) reflect a sense of discomfort with figurative language’s capacity to distance readers from factual accuracy. Because understanding the historical record is seen as the primary avenue through which the Shoah ought to be examined, literary metaphor, in Hyman’s terms, can be perceived “as a kind of deception of the reader” (42). Poetic discourses that inevitably draw linkages between the Nazi genocide and other events not only steer toward trivializing the horrors of the Holocaust, but are also criticized for distancing readers from engaging with contextual “factiveness” (42). As a result, subscribers to this particular line of inquiry are usually inclined to render metaphorical representations synonymous with an attack on the Shoah’s broader legacy — a prospect that prompts producers and consumers of Holocaust fiction to further interrogate the aesthetics of responsibility.

If, according to Wiesel, the Shoah “defies reference, analogy,” (Hyman 42) is it ultimately a mistake to depict the event through a figurative lens? As James Young points out, an effort to displace the Holocaust from literary

metaphor is a practice that runs the risk of removing it from language altogether (91). Because victims, writers, scholars, and poets have portrayed the Nazi genocide in poetic terms from the outset of Adolf Hitler's rise to the present moment (91), a directive against representative discourse — that is, a literal application of silence — would only ensure that the Holocaust becomes an understudied subject. And if discussions surrounding the Shoah were brought to a minimum, the Holocaust itself would be regarded with a degree of mystique, thus accomplishing exactly what the Nazis had aimed to set into motion “through their own — often metaphorical — mystification of events” (91). The answer, then, to the question of whether art can be configured from the world of Auschwitz is one that should be taken up through a framework that does not necessarily aim to prohibit figurative language. Rather, in Young's view, both readers and writers alike ought to reconceptualize their relationship with Holocaust literature in a manner that allows them to grapple with the *consequences* of metaphor “for both the victims and for our understanding of these events now” (92).

The notion that Holocaust fiction demands the construction of a precedent of responsible analysis is an idea that forms the basis of D.G Myers' “Responsible for Every Single Pain: Holocaust Literature and the Ethics of Interpretation” (1999). Inviting readers to reorient the way in which they approach representations of the Shoah, Myers ponders how literary conclusiveness can be garnered from victims' traumatic experiences over the course of the Second

World War. Despite acknowledging that interpretive engagement is a staple of Holocaust art, Myers echoes the words of Geoffrey Hartman — the founder of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies — to argue that analysis must be secondary to “an ethical response”.⁴ Failing to recognize that “ethics are prior to interpretation” is, in Myers’ view, a shortcoming that stems from a lack of unpacking “the responsibility [artists] assume toward the Holocaust text” (269). The sheer difficulty of establishing a framework of this nature, however, cannot be underestimated. Always straining the edges of a literary tightrope so as to balance ethical accountability with a creative impetus is the writer of Holocaust fiction, who aims, in the words of Alfred Alvarez, to draw linkages between “displacement, disguise and indirection” (26). Perhaps most challenging in a genre that is so firmly grounded in issues of responsibility is the matter of how authors can represent the Nazi genocide in a manner that not only accounts for the magnitude of the event, but also in a way that invites readers to ponder “the disquieting question ‘What is being asked of me?’” (Myers 270). This aesthetic obstacle is considered by Leslie Epstein, who concludes her essay entitled “Writing about the Holocaust” (1988) by pondering the difficulty of developing connections between the Shoah and contemporary consumers of Holocaust fiction: “Only those who have the imagination to recognize what they share with

⁴ While Myers’ use of Hartman’s reflections is extensive, his most telling excerpt outlines the central root of the literary theorist’s general argument: “what Hartman proposes is an ethics of response to Holocaust texts. And as the word *should* also reveals, his ethical impulse is deontological. That is, he prescribes a rule: you shall not substitute tears for analysis in interpreting Holocaust testimony” (267).

the force of evil . . . can fight fearlessly against it. And only this fight, this fearlessness can give meaning to the suffering of the Jewish people” (269-70).

As Young notes, the aesthetic argument for “a critical literary historiography” of the Shoah is not only rooted in a search for truth, but is also centred on the need for authors to delve into the complexities that underlined “the structural, mythological, and figurative apprehension of these facts” that resulted in their implementation on a widespread scale (4). Because attempts to employ realistic directness often result in representations that trivialize the experience of the Holocaust, artists are tasked with drawing upon other avenues through which they can immerse readers in the event’s surreal qualities.⁵ Rather than establishing narratives that are fraught with the simplicity of binary opposition — Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993), for example, problematically aims to reconstruct the concentration camps, yet frames the Shoah as a classic struggle between good and evil — or riddled with reductionist abstractions of the puerile variety — such as Martel’s *Beatrice & Virgil* (2010), which limits the Nazi genocide to a mere allegory — the true test for writers of

⁵ In his discussion of “bad art,” Hyman touches upon the linkages between efforts to realistically depict the Shoah and the trivialization of the event itself (44). Exploring the “dangers of creatively engaging the Holocaust,” he writes, “human suffering becomes imaged rather than imagined, is diminished by a directness which implies, but does not compel, a sympathetic engagement on the part of the audience. Furthermore, we know, as viewers, that behind those images there is an enormous apparatus, economic and artistic, that there are craftsmen, actors, technicians, accountants, that, at the end of the day, when the theatres empty, there will be profit statements, audience counts, and gilded statues handed out in front of a mass television audience. *In these cases silence seems preferable*” (45; emphasis added).

Holocaust fiction, Young argues, is to “delineate the border between fact and fiction” (52). Such indirectness is a staple of the best art, which balances the extent of historians’ fictionalization with the effect of novelists’ historicization (Young 6). As we shall see, “The Pegnitz Junction” achieves this sense of overlap by moving away from the conventional boundaries of the novella, thus prompting readers to regard the text’s form as complimentary to its content through a lens that blends the reality of a post-Holocaust world with a uniquely surreal framework.

The artist who seeks to represent the Shoah is tasked with considering not only the aesthetic challenge of crafting a fictional narrative out of “real past events,” (Young 63) but also with addressing moral difficulties that call the underlying basis of their work into question. Interrogating the memory of the Holocaust through figurative language requires readers and writers alike to balance factual representation with a shared capacity to ponder “beyond the imagination” (Alvarez 26) — a process that ultimately marries enormous opportunity with tremendous responsibility. Much like the listener to an Auschwitz survivor is permitted indirect access into a metaphorical room — of which entry ensures that one cannot “ever get out” (“StoryCorps 461”) — the producer and consumer of Holocaust fiction are left to journey through the passages of a poetic labyrinth, wherein artistic configuration acts in conjunction with accountable interpretation. As Hyman writes, the Shoah’s legacy continuously prompts humanity to confront, to question, and “to deny that any

meaningful questions can be asked at all” (61). And it is this ethical impetus that lies at the heart of “The Pegnitz Junction.”

CHAPTER TWO

The Complicity of the Ordinary: Memories of “The Adolf-time . . .” in “The Pegnitz Junction”

“The future is imaginary, but everyone is living in it as if it has happened. It is a collective hallucination.”

— Mavis Gallant

Although Young's warning regarding the capacity of language to supplant the horrors of the Shoah was circulated fifteen years after the original publication of "The Pegnitz Junction," his call for writers of Holocaust literature to engage, firsthand, with the practice of distancing had long served as a staple of Gallant's fiction. To avoid undermining "the truthfulness of the representation," (Oshman 11) Gallant sought to write in a manner that refused the boundaries of conventional storytelling — a tactic that reflected a generational shift at the outset of the seventies, geared toward offering a significant "alternative to standard practices of both narrative and language discourse" (Hyman 15). Arguing that Gallant's texts are often characterized by "qualities of abstractness and detachment," Janice Kulyk Keefer attributes much of the author's success to her personal fascination with exploring the "consciousness and experience of people in whom it would seem impossible to take a sympathetic interest" (8). For Gallant, crafting a representational window into the Nazi genocide was not the equivalent of penning speculative "novels-of-ideas" (13) — nor was it an opportunity to recreate the atrocities of Auschwitz through a sensationalized lens. Rather, Gallant believed that drawing linkages of familiarity between readers and subject matter was the primary avenue through which meaning could be configured out of trauma, thus rendering the lines between realism and surrealism "disturbingly familiar" (13).

Frequently hailed as her *magnum opus*, "The Pegnitz Junction" is Gallant's most complex, difficult, and ambitious work of fiction (Wilkshire 891).

The novella's basic premise appears to be straightforward — a woman, her lover, and his young son embark upon a train ride from Paris to Pegnitz — but its typological, moral, and teleological levels are multifaceted in their efforts to trouble reductionist trivializations and binary means of thought (Toye). Through blending a vast array of literary techniques — reconfigurations of time, space, and memory; fragmentation; caricature; parody; speech-acts; dreamscapes; allusive language; nonlinear voice; shifts in setting between the past, present, and future — Gallant's story grants readers access to a sense of indirectness that challenges their inclination to obtain logical connections. By categorically denying her audience the familiarity of methodical normalcy, Gallant creates a narrative in which form and content are not disproportionate to one another, but one wherein style and subject matter *inform* each other. Closely reading the novella, therefore, should not be synonymous with attempting to impose structure upon Gallant's work, as her depiction of a post-Holocaust world addresses the event through “[e]voking numerous sets of voices” (Schaub 27) — both indirectly and in hindsight.

From the outset of the story, readers are introduced to the novella's primary cast of characters, as well as the emotional tension that underlines their relationships — or lack thereof — with one another. Christine, a young German woman, joins her lover and his young son, Herbert and little Bert, on a holiday to Paris — the conclusion of which results in the three figures journeying on a train

back to Pegnitz, Germany.⁶ Though never present in the story itself, the shadow of Christine's fiancé, a theology student, looms large over the text's indecisive protagonist, who is left to ponder a future with each respective suitor. But rather than ending with a homecoming, the novella concludes in — or is a prelude to — a state of transit. Like Gallant's characters — who knowingly ride railroad carriages with both literal and metaphorical linkages to the very structures that brought cattle cars full of people to their fateful imprisonment over the course of the Second World War — the expectations of readers are fundamentally derailed, as the last page of the text reveals that the train's final destination is a concentration camp. Gallant concludes on this melancholy, yet nevertheless tactical note, not only dispelling the notion of the train's linearity, but also fragmenting the mindset of both passengers and readers, in that the novella's characters, setting, and substance gesture to fascism's roots in ordinary people.

Why did Gallant obsess over evil's "small possibilities" (Hancock 100) in the every day? Grappling with this question entails placing the author's attention to the "small details of language" (Toye) in conjunction with shifts in the dynamic between primary and secondary figures alike. According to Margaret E. Toye's "The promise and the apology: speech-acts, ethics, and reading in Mavis Gallant's 'The Pegnitz Junction,'" (2011) one of the novella's most telling features is the way

⁶ The incentive behind the characters' decision to journey by train is an understudied feature of the novella. In the text's opening pages, the Paris airports are revealed to have "gone on strike," (Gallant 4) which as Neil Kalman Besner argues, is "one of the first of the story's many signals of social breakdown" (151).

in which Gallant approaches the performativity that informs promises and apologies. For Toye, Gallant's characters make and break promises almost exclusively in terms of their association with authority, memory, and action. Apparent, in this regard, is the relationship that Gallant establishes between Christine and the aforementioned suitors. Herbert, an engineer, is the person that is closest to Christine — precisely because his behaviour and language contrast her fiancé's, who is known to “put up barriers such as too much talk, self-analysis, or second thoughts” (2). The theology student, a man of scholarship, demonstrates a penchant for discourses of inspection that serves to frustrate Christine. Given Gallant's liking of figurative forms of representation, critics tend to read the lovers as allegorical depictions of two conceptions of Germany — the former reflecting “a newer, technological” Deutschland, with the latter signifying older times (Toye). And although they are often considered in opposition to one another, Gallant blurs the lines between that which differentiates the suitors, as neither man “fulfills the ‘promise’ of these initial characterizations” (Toye).

Christine's effort to read a book of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's essays forms the extent of her fiancé's influence on the novella. While characters — and in turn, readers — are never afforded an opportunity to directly engage with the theology student, the constant presence of Bonhoeffer's work is a recurring reminder of the Shoah's influence on thought and memory both during and after the Second World War. Because Gallant's careful use of Bonhoeffer helps to capture the story's broader intentions, I return to this element of the novella in Chapter

Three, where I explore the philosopher's ideas and underlying beliefs in relation to the challenges of living in a post-Auschwitz world. By extension, I save my rumination on the significance of little Bert — whose fascination with the prospect of reading serves as a medium through which Gallant resists the framing of alternate realities — for the final section of this thesis.

Herbert's relationship with authority is among the more complicated features of Gallant's novella, particularly due to the inconsistency that informs his connection to actions and words. Toye highlights the frequency with which Herbert claims that he shall complain about instances of poor service as an example of his erratic propensities. Herbert's unwillingness to stand up to figures of authority is especially puzzling in light of the fact that he prides himself on demonstrating a sufficient degree of command over language.⁷ Having mastered German regional dialects, Herbert's expertise is on full display when he spots the incongruity that underlines a woman's attempt to present herself as an American, recognizing "that she was not supposed to know any German, let alone German spoken with that accent" (Gallant 79-80). Yet Toye notes that Herbert's greatest

⁷ Herbert's passivity runs rampant throughout the story, but it is noticeably apparent in the opening segment of the novella. When Herbert, Christine, and little Bert prepare to leave the hotel in which they have stayed, Christine takes note of Herbert's frustration — as well as the lack of substance to this threats: "He said only that the porter had behaved strangely and that he really would write to the Guide Michelin. Sometimes Herbert meant more than he said; if so, the porter might have something to fear" (Gallant 7). Besner adds that such exchanges speak to the nature of Herbert's character: "Again readers realize that Herbert's style is to conform amiably, to maintain the status quo no matter how severely provoked" (159).

strength is also his greatest weakness, for he is forthright in articulating “the ways he believes language should be used and not used” (Toye). Not only does he constantly try to bring Christine’s interactions with little Bert to abrupt conclusions, but he also makes careless promises on a regular basis — even going as far as to request his lover’s hand in marriage, only to act “as if nothing had been said” a matter of seconds later (Gallant 47).⁸ Herbert’s failure to question those who treat his companions poorly, coupled with his attempts to curtail the language of others while often speaking in reckless terms himself parallels the structural forces — the silencing of the politically engaged, the refusal to acknowledge the past, the imbalance between authority figures and their counterparts — that enabled the spread of fascism in the years preceding the Second World War. While critics have read Herbert’s understanding of the importance of language in accordance with his overarching sense of passivity as an allegorical representation of “scientists who disagreed with the Nazis before the war but who failed to speak out against them,” (Toye) due attention ought to be paid to the subtlety that Gallant invokes in framing his character. Like his fellow passengers, Herbert “has the ability and the potential, but he chooses not to act,” (Toye) which, as we shall see, carries potentially disastrous ramifications for written and spoken discourse in a post-Holocaust setting.

⁸ Note, too, that Herbert has attempted stunts of this variety prior to the start of the story. The third paragraph of the novella, for instance, concludes with Christine referencing a similar episode: “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, or to imagine how his voice must have sounded to her” (Gallant 2).

While Herbert's use and abuse of language allows questions to be raised about the attitudes that informed the rise of the Nazis, Gallant's prose has also been criticized for the extent to which its plotlessness and fragmentation renders readers bewildered. Although they offer the novella an ample degree of praise, George Woodcock and William Pritchard's critical commentaries do not hesitate to scrutinize the difficulty of engaging with Gallant's fiction, both expressing concern about the author's tendency to confuse her audience.⁹ For Keefer, such doubts really reflect a more general suspicion about Gallant's selection of narrative strategy — that is, “Christine as psychic screen . . . and the bizarre playfulness that pervades the text” (177). That Christine's imagination is the lens that permits readers access to the story's shifting settings — the emotional interior of primary and secondary characters, as well as the exterior wasteland upon which they travel — ultimately adds to the mystique of the novella's indirectness, which is almost always cryptic in its allusions to the Nazi genocide. For example, in one “flashback *hors due texte*,” (Keefer 173) Christine and her counterparts sit near a set of railroad tracks and observe the behaviour of a set of women “grouped by nationality — Polish, French, Greek, Russian, Dutch” (Gallant 81). Christine takes careful note of the Frenchwomen, detecting both the specifics of their attire (“hair swept up and forward and frizzed with tongs,” “uniformly dressed in navy-blue suits and white blouses”) and their obvious discomfort (“thin and restless,” “[t]heir glance was hostile”) in awaiting the return

⁹ See Woodcock, “Memory, Imagination, Artifice,” and Pritchard, review of *The Pegnitz Junction*.

of the conductor (Gallant 81). Although parallels of this variety are relatively scarce in terms of their connection to the Second World War, readers are aware of what the scene in question is actually about. Not only do the women's "wartime fashions" (Keefer 173) directly contrast Christine's apparel of the sixties, but their state of being "ill with terror" (Gallant 84) at the sight of the conductor also suggests that the legacy of the Shoah continues to inflict a sense of anxiety upon the European public, thus allowing Gallant to invoke subtle — albeit haunting — linkages to Holocaust imagery.¹⁰

While Gallant often favours references that draw delicate, but nevertheless astute allusions to the Nazi genocide, she is precise in employing literal representations of the underpinnings of fascism. Chief among her more direct portrayals of the culture surrounding the Shoah is her depiction of Herbert's prejudices and the ways in which he impresses them upon others. In spite of the fact that neither Herbert nor Christine could have been active in enabling the Nazi uprising, Gallant uses these individuals to channel the pervasiveness of Hitler's doctrine in a post-Auschwitz world.¹¹ As Keefer claims, the "information" that Christine receives, along with the attitudes of her companions, is Gallant's

¹⁰ As Besner notes, the conductor "is both comically harmless and a potentially terrifying figure. The empty posturing of authority — the 'small possibility' of Fascism in individuals — appears sufficient to inspire . . . terror" (160). This particular allusion is also an example of a case in which time is collapsed, as the women's horror at the sight of the conductor renders linearity unrecognizable.

¹¹ Keefer highlights the fact that "Herbert was too young to have been a functioning member of the Nazi state," (175) while the younger Christine is "from a small bombed baroque German city, where all that was worthwhile keeping had been rebuilt and which now looked as pink and golden as a pretty child and as new as morning" (Gallant 1).

way of unpacking “the hypocrisy, shallowness of understanding, and untroubled prejudices that prevail not only among post-war Germans, but also among all those who, having fixed for their consciences a convenient destination, come to believe they are home free when they are only in transit” (172-73).¹² We are confronted with proof of this reality when Herbert goes to great lengths to avoid bringing little Bert into a station café that is occupied by “guest workers” (Gallant 62). Although Herbert maintains that the foreign workers are “needed for the economy,” Christine sees through the bigotry of her lover’s preconceptions, noting that his real concern is rooted in “racial animosity”: “the guest workers had brought with them new strains of tuberculosis, syphilis, and amebic complaints that resisted antibiotics. Everyone knew this, but the government was hushing it up. . . . Herbert did not want little Bert, young and vulnerable, to drink out of the same glasses as foreign disease-bearers” (62). By rendering prejudicial fears of the ‘other’ an attribute of one of the novella’s primary characters, Gallant underscores the degree to which racism enveloped European society in the years that followed the Holocaust, thus asking readers to confront not only Herbert’s biases, but also their own capacity for complicity in maintaining views of this nature.

¹² It is important to note that the concept of transit entails a dual meaning over the course of the novella. While Keefer is correct to gesture to the notion of a state of passage, her excerpt does not mention the inexplicable goal of transit in the context in which the characters find themselves — the widespread murder, that is, of cattle cars full of people heading to concentration camps over the course of the Second World War. In fact, the word “transit” was the euphemism chosen by the Nazis for the railcars that ended up at the death camps.

The extent of Europe's prejudices is not limited to Gallant's representation of Herbert, but is alternatively a staple of a myriad of the novella's figures. Gallant presents fear and loathing as a distinct feature of the problematic makeup of both pre and post-war Germany — the implications of which are rooted in and fleshed out through the individual's ability to succumb to fascism's "small possibilities" (Hancock 100). Herbert's tendencies, for example, originally stem from the misfortune of his mother. As a survivor of a concentration camp, she returns home with "bitter stories" about the individuals with whom she was jailed alongside:

She died early and stayed in his mind as a bloated sick woman eating sugar and telling bitter stories — how the Slav prisoners were selfish, the Dutch greedy, the French self-seeking and dirty, spreaders of lice and fleas. She had gone into captivity believing in virtue and learned she could steal.

Went in loving the poor, came out afraid of them; went in for the hounded, came out a racist; went in generous, came out grudging; went in with God, came out alone. (12)

On the one hand, Herbert's internal monologue on his late mother places readers in a position of relative understanding. She, too, is revealed to be a victim of the Nazi state, which in turn causes her to despise those whom she had previously sympathized with. On the other, Herbert's reflection provides Gallant's audience with a window into the sense of detachment that a mentality of this kind fabricates. Attempting to differentiate himself from his mother, Herbert ponders:

[He] did not believe for a second that the Dutch were this or the French were that; he went to France often, said that French was the sole language of culture, there was no poetry in English, something else was wrong with Russian and Italian. At the same time he thought nothing of repeating his mother's remarks. (12)

What is striking about this rumination is the way Gallant treads on some of the most sensitive postwar anxieties — the lack of willingness to assume responsibility for the event, the capacity to pivot away from accepting accountability when confronted with the reality of one's complicity, and the ensuing temptation to wrest oneself away from the truth of memory. Despite being gradually reminded of the bigotry that envelops his own thoughts, Herbert resists any form of direct engagement, opting instead to settle with the comfortable recognition that he would never *repeat* "his mother's remarks" (12). Such prejudices remain internalized and an examination of his mindset is temporarily evaded — for Herbert, silence is the ultimate equalizer.

If Herbert's unwillingness to reframe his line of thought is what lies at the crux of his "roundabout hypocrisy," (Keefer 174) then his ambiguous use of language is a by-product of avoiding responsibility. A "scarred stranger" seemingly echoes Herbert's remarks about guest workers, yet whether his statement — "That place is always packed with foreigners" — is uttered in confidence or under the guise of uncomfortable agreement remains unclear (Gallant 63). Herbert's response to the man's comment continues to push the

confusion of characters and readers alike further, as he not only asks the stranger about personal objections to the presence of the workers, but also goes on to offer an opinion: “Now the children of the partisans come here as guest workers . . . And we all drink coffee together. What could be better?” (63). As Christine attests, the fact that Herbert “always said such things with a smile” adds to the discomfort of his counterparts, in that “[p]eople who did not know him had to think again, wondering what they had heard. No one knew how to deal with Herbert’s ambiguities” (63). That Herbert is notorious for speaking in an equivocal way — or, as Toye holds, a manner in which he is “deemed to be seriously ethically challenged through his inability to imagine, that is, to put himself in the position of the other” (Toye) — encapsulates the confusion and discomfort that both preceded and loomed amidst wartime Europe. Unlike Christine and little Bert — who, as we shall see, are *potential* sources of hope and despairing loss in a post-Holocaust world — Herbert’s moral shortcomings represents humanity’s failure to trouble the problematic preconceptions that led to not only the ideological surge of Nazism, but also its capacity to be inflicted upon other generations.

If Herbert is the novella’s chief perpetuator of unwarranted prejudices, then his primary “counterpart” is a fellow passenger in his compartment (Keefer 174). A diabetic German widow — who, as we piece together, is named Frau Joseph Schneider — spends the duration of the train ride eating voraciously and reminiscing “about the forty-seven years she spent in America, devotedly

preparing gargantuan meals for her husband and relations” (Keefer 174). But as the narrative progresses, the ramifications of her actions — and their concealed undertones — become increasingly disturbing. Her compulsive eating creates a foul smell in the passenger coach, while her memories are riddled with both “anti-Semitic clichés” and attempts to frame alternate realities (Keefer 174). For Keefer, the most blatant instance of the widow’s “historical fantasies” (174) — crafted through her anti-Semitism — is especially apparent in one of her ruminations:

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 this plan had been sabotaged by the President of the USA. Too bad. It could have saved many famous old statues and quite a few lives. (Gallant 54)

The extent of the widow’s ignorance is twofold. Keefer highlights the fact that the widow’s clichés are trite, yet telling of her mindset — “President Roosevelt was really a Dutch Jew from a family of thieves named Roszenfeldt, who had been able to take over the entire USA ten years after emigrating there” (174) — while also noting that her reflections underscore the inherent danger of refusing to trouble the incongruity of the imagination. And although the widow’s lack of concern with the lives of Jews is a glaring example of Gallant’s attempt to warn readers about the risk of succumbing to fascist doctrines, her obsessive devouring

of food is a more subtle gesture to the underpinnings of such ideologies. Like Herbert, the German widow is a metaphorical stand-in for complicity in the pervasiveness of Nazism — in Gallant’s terms, “the origin of the worm — the worm that destroyed the structure” (Schaub 26) — during the fallout of the Second World War. The stink of the widow’s food entails dual connotations, in that her literal ingestion of rotten meals serves as a figurative allusion to her absorption of deplorable ideas. Both avenues of consumption are known to be fraught with harm — the mere sight of the former is a sure sign of its inherent health hazards, while the substance of the latter is infused with damaging rhetoric and policies alike — but are nevertheless toyed with, and in turn guzzled over the course of the train ride. The reek of the food lingers long after the widow swallows her last bite — the shadow of fascism, by extension, continues to encompass the European public.

Complicity in the event, however, is not limited to the novella’s primary and secondary characters, but is alternatively part of seemingly ordinary interactions. For Gallant, developing a dialogue — or lack thereof — “between past and present, between history and fiction” (Schaub 26) lies in recognizing that, “[i]f we wan[t] to find out how and why this happened it [is] the Germans we [have] to question” (Hancock 99). The tensions that underline postwar Europe are directly related to the Germans’ unwillingness to accept responsibility for previous injustices. The relationship between a group of opera fans and their “cultural leader,” (Gallant 72) for instance, highlights the level of disintegration

that defines Gallant's representation of Germany, in that "each individual character is on trial" (Schaub 26). While heading to the night's concert, the group leader prompts his followers to contemplate the subject of European art and culture. Such a consideration results in a moment of tremendous discomfort when the leader makes reference to the reign of Adolf Hitler. The exchange begins when he speaks the words, "The Adolf-time . . ." — a phrase that induces anxiety in the moments that follow, wherein a wave of "reproachful silence" filled with "creaking thoughts" assumes control of the group, which in turn is alleviated when the leader affirms that the era in question, ". . . was a sad time for art in this country" (71-72). The group leader's utterance is the only occasion in which Hitler is mentioned by name in the novella, but the implications of the ensuing response is telling of the emotional state of the operagoers. Rather than engaging in an analytical discussion about the devastating consequences of "The Adolf-time," the opera fans are rendered speechless, and are finally relieved of "holding their breath" when the leader changes the subject to the significance of art during Hitler's reign (71-72).

As we shall see when we examine the ramifications of Christine's effort to read Bonhoeffer's essays, the group leader's reference to the rule of the Nazis encroaches upon the alternate reality that the concertgoers have devised for themselves. The question of how to respond to this remark is one that both characters and readers of Gallant's novella are left to grapple with. The group's immediate reaction — that is, to breathe a sigh of relief when mention of the

Holocaust is averted — may initially strike Gallant’s audience as a diversion from readers’ expectations. However, it is this suspension of normalcy that allows readers to ponder the ways in which the novella’s aesthetic form is central to informing the basis of its content. Instead of attempting to draw logical connections from the illogical behaviour of the concertgoers, the text invites Gallant’s readership to explore the role that language plays in preserving and erasing historical memory. Although the leader’s mere reference to “The Adolftime” illustrates the ability of discourse to maintain historical linkages to the past, his assertion — that Hitler’s reign was simply “a sad time for art” — reminds readers of the dangers that can arise when human beings fail to take accountability for previous acts of indiscretion (71-72).¹³

While the Shoah’s influence on aesthetics is an underlying feature of Christine’s observance of the women “grouped by nationality,” (81) as well as the medium through which the cultural leader and his counterparts avoid responsibility (71-72), Gallant also gestures to its implications for gender and race in a post-Auschwitz world. When Christine, Herbert, and little Bert venture toward a newsstand, Christine takes note of a contentious story that the local paper examines through three pages worth of a “ferocious war of opinion” (65). Once again, Gallant dispels any logical assumptions concerning the substance of the article, which Christine echoes in her internal monologue:

¹³ The reference also highlights the way in which certain individuals enable themselves to re-write history in a less damning way — or in a manner that allows them to escape accountability and historical engagement.

Was it about the barbed wire? About the careless rerouting of trains that had stranded dozens of passengers in this lamentable, godforsaken, Prussian-looking town? No, it was about an exhibition of photographs Dr. Ischias had commissioned and sponsored for his new museum — an edifice so bold in conception and structure that it was known throughout the region as ‘the teacup with mumps.’ (65)

The absurdity of the controversy is heightened by the aggressive nature of the accusations that are levied against Dr. Ischias. No stranger to Philistine anger, the photographs that Dr. Ischias commissions depict the nude body of a female model. He, in turn, is accused of both “taking the public for dimwits” and “sapping morals and contributing to the artistic decline of a race” (65). The response of the general public is summed up by the headline that the newspaper employs to describe the backlash: “ARE GERMAN WOMEN BABOONS AND MUST THEY ALWAYS EXHIBIT THEIR BACKSIDES?” (66). The photograph is also accompanied with an insulting image that is crafted by one of the newspaper’s illustrators: “This was followed up by a cartoon drawing of a creature, a gorilla probably, with his head under the dark hood of an old-fashioned camera on a tripod, about to take the picture of three Graces, or three Rhine maidens, or three stout local matrons who had somehow lost their clothes” (66).¹⁴ That contributors to the publication are involved in an extensive debate

¹⁴ This is also a powerful reference to the cartoons that were used to designate Jews as inferior creatures, down the race hierarchy as was — and is — common with all theories of racial hierarchy. Specifically, the passage conjures up linkages

over Dr. Ischias's role in allegedly ushering forth a racial decline and reportedly "insulting the purity of German womanhood" (Keefer 173) is reflective of the emotional atmosphere of postwar Europe, wherein denoting cultural differences is given precedent over assuming responsibility for previous injustices. The author of the opinion piece that occupies the front page is particularly vicious in his condemnation of Dr. Ischias's work: "Once again . . . art has not known how to toe the mark or draw the line. Can filth be art? If so, let us do without it. Let us do without the photographer in question and his archangel, the curator with the funny name" (65). Not only do the connotations surrounding "the curator with the funny name" disparage Dr. Ischias's ethnic heritage, but the content of the images — the nakedness of the female body, notwithstanding the fact that the subject is the photographer's wife — is also revealed to be a subject that artists ought to avoid (65-66). And, as Christine's musings show, the "four-column double head" does not hesitate to prioritize linking racial difference to so-called "filth" over stories addressing "barbed wire" and "the careless rerouting of trains," (65-66) thus consciously ignoring — and ultimately giving rise to — further incidents of "historical *déjà vu*" (Keefer 173).

The shadow that is cast by European conceptions of racial othering also continues to loom in passages that may initially appear to be of little importance to Gallant's broader story. Keefer draws attention to the significance of incidents

to "degenerate art" (*Entartete Kunst*) — adopted by the Nazis over the course of 1920s to remove German modernist art from museums that were owned by the state.

of this variety — some of which Christine repeatedly ponders, while others are only briefly alluded to. The confusion that is impressed upon readers arises because of the lack of clarity connecting the scenes in question, which include, “a group of revolting school-girls boarding the train at one of its many indeterminate halts, the antics of a fat, spoiled brat, [and] a glimpse of coarse, bedraggled soldiers lounging by a station” (Keefer 175). Taken separately, these moments seem to be somewhat nonsensical — each episode only further articulates the degree to which traditional literary norms are absent, while Gallant’s readership is not afforded closure when the characters exit the narrative. Keefer proposes a more general association between such surrealistic incidents, insofar as “the pastiche cements the caricature of the master race sketched by Gallant” (175). Echoing the columnist’s comments regarding “the artistic decline of a race,” (65) Gallant, too, traces Germany’s descent — albeit in a manner that is not predicated on notions of prejudicial superiority. Her representation of the schoolgirls, spoiled child, and disheveled soldiers not only highlights the incongruity that lies at the root of Hitler’s fascist doctrine — they, after all, are jarring examples of a so-called “master race” in tatters — but also underscores the forces that were responsible for the Nazi uprising and the atrocities that ensued. Readers are left to piece together the ways that the unreality of the novella parallels the sense of indirectness that brings the story’s characters along the path to Pegnitz. Each of these individuals must deal with the

ramifications of life after the Holocaust, which hovers in spite of attempts to consciously displace it from memory.

Gallant's caricature of conceptions of the "master race" is not limited to passing signifiers of wartime images, but is also represented through portrayals of postwar shame. As Keefer claims, the extent of Europe's guilt is epitomized by the behaviour of an unmarried German woman, who — alone and pregnant — feigns being wed to a member of the American army as a way of concealing her true identity (175). Although Christine initially thinks of the woman as "The American" — an observation that is assumed upon witnessing her erratic tendencies, as well as the "shock" of her appearance — Herbert's expertise in regional dialects of Germany allows him to see through the disguise, as he takes note of "her nationality, schooling, region, village — what part of village, even, if one was particular over details" (Gallant 78-79). While he does not emphatically draw attention to the woman's impersonation, Herbert subtly tricks her into admitting awareness of the geography of her destination, which, as Toye puts it, is "knowledge only a German person would have. But he does so by himself posing as being from another part of Germany, thus mirroring her posing" (Toye). The woman recognizes her mistake, noting that her error is a product of Herbert's trickery: "she remembered that she was not supposed to know any German, let alone German spoken with that accent. She had been deceived by the look of Herbert; he was nothing more than a local product like herself" (79-80). Yet if it is Herbert who catches the woman's verbal blunder, it is Christine who truly

understands what informs the crux of the woman's actions — her performance is not constructed out of malice, but is alternatively a response to a prospect that is felt by the majority of the train's passengers: "the girl was ashamed of being *thought German* by other Germans" (80; emphasis added). By attempting to hide her German heritage, the woman discloses a level of generational shame that mirrors European society's failure to assume accountability for the Holocaust. Like the members of the cultural group, the woman's response to the discomfort of "being thought German" (80) is not to address that which lies at the heart of her anxieties, but to close the doors of the past by displacing herself from basic signifiers of her cultural background. And although the woman likely aims to forget the Nazi genocide, the passage invites readers to question if, in fact, distancing herself from her heritage is a responsible reaction to the grief attendant upon memories of the Shoah. Rather than undertaking a thoughtful degree of engagement with the complexities of the past, the woman lives in fear of not only being viewed as a German, but also of having to face this reality alongside "other Germans" (80) — for recognizing her shared nationality would be synonymous with realizing that she, too, is capable of capitulating to fascism's "small possibilities" (Hancock 100) in the every day. For Gallant's readership, this piece of information is indicative of one of the novella's central thematic issues — the responsibility that is at stake when human beings try to propel the narrative of history. The pregnant woman and her German counterparts are figures that intentionally turn a blind eye to the thought of the Second World War

so as to distance themselves from the enormous burden that is impressed upon individuals who take accountability for previous wrongdoings. In being afforded a chance to examine this form of disconnection, readers are invited to consider the role that memory — or lack thereof — plays in bearing witness to trauma.

The irony that underlines Herbert's identification of the woman's error is reflective of the wider emotional atmosphere of postwar Germany, in that he, too, is complicit in both fearing the repercussions of "being thought German" (80) and perpetuating failure to responsibly remember the Second World War. In a way that is comparable to the behaviour of the pregnant lady, Herbert approaches public interactions by avoiding his mother tongue — opting, instead, to speak French "so as to pass himself off as French" (Schaub 35). More blatant, however, is his pervasive sense of embarrassment when confronted with memories that he wishes to forget. When a Norwegian bass baritone companion makes reference to German reparations, Herbert distances himself from the substance of the discussion. The Norwegian begins by stating, "On the subject of German reparations I am open-minded" — to which Herbert responds, "I am open-minded too" (49). Their dialogue is not undertaken through a framework of sensitivity — instead, as Christine observes, Herbert's comment is uttered in a manner that is "every bit as *amiable* as the Norwegian" (49; emphasis added). Such sentiments are then echoed by the diabetic woman, who remarks, "What I keep asking myself is where does the money come from? . . . And these payments

go on! And on! Where does it all come from?” (49-50).¹⁵ When the Norwegian suggests — albeit non-assertively — that, “It is only right that *you* pay,” Herbert takes issue with the subtle implication of the proposition in question, smiling as he replies, “Of course it is right . . . However, I object to *your* use of ‘*you*’” (50; emphasis added).

In analyzing Gallant’s representation of collective apologies, Toye pays close attention to the rhetoric surrounding war reparations. Drawing linkages between offers of remorse and historical accountability, Toye asks readers to contemplate the way in which such speech acts both permit and conceal a language of the Holocaust:

Is Gallant dramatizing yet more refusals of responsibility by the characters, that is, is she focused once more on excuses rather than apologies? Or is she raising questions with regard to how long should the reparations go on by foregrounding the narrative of the generations? Is she criticizing the characters or is she raising questions around attempts to convert regret into a monetary sum as a sufficient fulfillment of an apology? (Toye)

¹⁵ Note that Herbert discusses the matter with the Norwegian and the diabetic woman in an ambiguous tone. Much like Christine’s comment regarding the uncertainty that often envelops Herbert’s speech — “No one knew how to deal with Herbert’s ambiguities” (63) — his remarks on reparations only further confuse his counterparts. After the diabetic woman offers an opinion that is largely preoccupied with material concerns, Herbert replies, “Don’t worry . . . The beneficiaries die younger than most other people. They die early for their age groups. Actuarial studies are reassuring on that point” (50). Watching the reactions of his fellow passengers, Christine observes, “It was impossible for the two strangers to tell if Herbert was glad or sorry” (50).

The answers to questions of this scope can be found in the specifics of Herbert's exchange. That the interchange is set through an "amiable" line of inquiry is telling of the characters' emotional undercurrent, as Herbert's "smiling" appearance serves as the avenue through which Gallant delves into the issue of post-Shoah ethics (49-50). The dialogue does not concern itself with solely addressing responses to the colonial process, but alternatively pushes the edges of readers' comfort, in that Gallant indirectly interrogates the sentiments that enabled Hitler's fascist doctrine to come to light. Gallant's central subject, therefore, is one of responsibility, insofar as she not only prompts readers to consider whether it is appropriate to discuss the Holocaust — an event that resulted in the deaths of approximately 6 million Jews and 17 million victims overall — in a nonchalant manner, but also invites them to ponder the ramifications of speaking amiably about an economic resolution to a problem as serious as the Nazi genocide. While the characters' discussion certainly paints the Shoah through a reductionist lens, Gallant goes a step further in her engagement with the ethics of detachment. Herbert's reference to the "beneficiaries" (50) of German reparations is purposefully clouded, revealing that although readers understand the substance of the topic at hand, the text's characters have learned to employ language that either masks or erases gestures to previous instances of trauma. In spite of the fact that his remark acknowledges the reality of an increasingly troubling prospect — "The beneficiaries . . . die early for their age groups" (50) — it fails to grapple with the reasons as to why the mortality rates of

these individuals is particularly high. By refusing to address that which causes the deaths of those who survived the concentration camps, Herbert ultimately distances himself from the event — a factor that is epitomized by his response to the Norwegian: “I object to your use of ‘you’” (50). As Toye explains, Herbert’s assumption of silence is merely reflective of the broader anxieties that hover over the novella’s characters, in that the Norwegian’s intimation — “It is only right that you pay” (50) — ensures that he, too, avoids “the moral dictum” (Toye) of collective accountability.

Gallant’s experimentation with the aesthetics of responsibility, however, is not without its suggestive possibilities. Often undertaking the form of italicized intertexts, Gallant employs narrative interruptions as a way of providing readers with a window into the mindset of Christine. Whereas Herbert “uses language to do something with words, but what he does is attempt to control both language and people,” Christine, according to Toye, “spends most of her time listening and receiving information, with attempts at communicating” (Toye). Much of the scholarship pertaining to the “information” that Christine receives is correctly predicated on the recognition that her capacity “to eavesdrop on silent monologues” is synonymous with an ability to “uncove[r] the hypocrisy, shallowness of understanding, and untroubled prejudices that prevail . . . among post-war Germans” (Keefer 171-72). Yet absent from certain discussions of the novella is a willingness to interrogate the fundamental instability that envelops Christine’s transmission and reception of “information” — a lack, that is, of

readiness to examine the possibility that such intertexts are figments of Christine's imagination. As always, Gallant refuses to provide any concrete conclusions, thus prompting her readership to place the notion of the novella as a "disjointed 'television screen' narrative" — frequent in its figuring of instances of "historical *déjà vu*" (Keefer 173) — in conjunction with the idea that Christine's lack of "control over this language" (Toye) also renders her complicit in the framing of alternate realities.¹⁶

Grappling with the dynamic between contrasting interpretations of the novella's intertexts is rooted in understanding that one of the story's most consistent themes is that of inconstancy. Christine's observance of "a family party climbing a hill to what they have been assured is a museum-castle" (Keefer 175) highlights this sense of incongruity — the episode originally appears to have no connection to the broader narrative at hand, its cast of characters exiting the novella almost as soon as they enter it. The passage — which tells of Uncle Ludwig, Uncle Bebo, Aunt Barbara, Aunt Eva, Uncle Max, Uncle Georg, Aunt Milena, Grandmother, and the "horrible Jürgen" (27) — initially reads like a fairy-tale, but concludes on a note of sheer horror when a small boy kills Jürgen in a parking lot with a knife. The story is reminiscent of Franz Kafka's *The Castle* (1926) in terms of its emphasis on unresponsive bureaucracy and the futility that

¹⁶ Christine describes her inability to maintain command over language by using the phrase, "there has been too much interference" (Gallant 46). As Toye observes: "This interference of other people's voices affects her ability to think or make a decision — that is, until the end when she can clear a place for herself, put the voices aside, and make a choice" (Toye).

underlies unfamiliar laws and rules. Yet the “pastiche of Kafka” (Keefer 175) is also riddled with interpretive possibilities for readers who have not encountered the work of the twentieth century writer. Its focus on matter and consumption, coupled with its gestures to violence indirectly mirror some of the novella’s broader subjects — the family members express excessive pride in their possessions, while the boy forever puts an end to Jürgen’s antics. And although lines can be drawn between these suggestive capacities and Christine’s world — the characters obsess over consumption in a way that is comparable to the train’s passengers, while the boy’s powerful revenge on a perpetrator of terror foreshadows the conclusion of the novella, wherein Christine and little Bert embrace actions that invert the expectations of their counterparts — the question of Gallant’s purpose remains open.

Attention ought to be paid to the manner in which Christine frames the haunting exchange, as she begins to peer out of the window in order “[t]o escape the Norwegian’s staring” (Gallant 27). In spite of the fact that departing from the carriage is Christine’s natural way of avoiding the gaze of her Norwegian counterpart, Gallant’s use of the word “escape” (27) is telling of the scene’s emotional atmosphere. Like Herbert, who speaks French to steer away from the embarrassment of being recognized by others as a German, Christine, too, desires disguise — yet her lack of control over language sharply limits her ability to attain detachment. As a result, she receives “information” which “comes to her erratically, intuitive[ly], [and] empathetically,” in that “bits of people’s inner

voices replaying the detailed, trivial, mundane recollections of their lives” continuously plagues her thoughts (Brandt 29). While Christine’s reception of “information” reveals the degree to which implicit and explicit memories of the Shoah are both permitted and resisted in the every day interactions of Europeans, Gallant is cautious about how she infuses the text with surreal qualities. Multiple sets of voices are indeed filtered through Christine — who, as Schaub notes, is the receiver of “cultural, historical, political, racist, or social” discourses (27) — but whether her intuition is a byproduct of “her unusual insight into people’s lives and her exceptional mind reading skill” (32) remains purposefully unclear.¹⁷ To argue, then, that Christine’s internal monologues signify an ability to partake in a form of telepathic communication is to fall short in one’s reading of the novella’s primary character. Rather than solely interpreting Christine’s ruminations as evidence of an unusual sixth sense — which in turn defies the disorder that Gallant establishes over the course of the text — a more nuanced analysis of scenes of this variety tells of an underlying connection between the human imagination and the “small possibilities” of the sensational “in people” (Hancock 100). But Gallant is careful to verify that Christine is not mentally unbalanced. In an interview with Geoff Hancock, the author remarks:

¹⁷ Although Schaub compares Christine to “a medium disclosing the inner and outer lives of the people who happen to be in her vicinity,” (36) she does not hesitate to gesture to the unusual scope of her reflections. In Schaub’s view, the castle scene speaks to the multidimensionality of Christine’s character, in that it underscores not only her apparent telepathic capacities, but also “her dissatisfaction with the state of the world, while highlighting her creative imagination” (36).

She [Christine] is not inventing or making up stories. Everything that the young woman sees when she looks out the train window, she really does see. A kind of magic, if you like. To my mind, a short circuit. 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. I could hear him thinking. Because one does very often. (Hancock 123)¹⁸

Like her counterparts, Christine is also capable of crafting alternate realities — a practice that, as Toye notes, renders her “ethically open to the language of the other, although throughout most of the story she seems a little too open” (Toye). For Gallant, the true danger of imagined actualities lies in the “the human potential for inhumane behavior,” (Smythe 90) as the fertility of the mind is the medium through which the novella’s characters — even Christine — are derailed from processing truth.¹⁹ And while the castle scene best exemplifies the notion that Christine “seems a little too open,” (Toye) Grazia Merler draws attention to two other internal stories that achieve a similar purpose in the text: “on another channel, comes the story of Julchen Knopp and the new anti-authoritarian army, the existential tale of the new German generation. The story of Siri follows. As a

¹⁸ Note, too, that Gallant does not disclose whether such ruminations are indicative of telepathic powers or a “creative imagination” (Schaub 36). Rather, she maintains that internal monologues of this nature are habits that “one does very often” (Hancock 123).

¹⁹ To echo Schaub: “By generating an alternative reading of postwar Germany, the text establishes that the inherent potential for fascism is not just a German characteristic; it is human” (37).

child he escaped from the East into the West with his parents, was uprooted, and is now perhaps a policeman” (57-58). Each respective tale showcases Gallant’s use of “flashback *hors du texte*,” (Keefer 173) — and both entail literal and figurative linkages to the implications for memory in a post-Auschwitz world.

If the text’s characters are complicit in failing to assume collective accountability for the wrongdoings of the past, the reader, then, is responsible for ethically engaging with the meaning of the novella. The tangential indirectness of Gallant’s story places the author’s audience in a problematized position — realistic directness is denied so as to avoid trivializing the event, and the specifics of the Nazi genocide do not form the basis of aesthetic representation. This suspension of imaginative access is the avenue through which Gallant draws allusions to the “Adolf-time,” (71) thus prompting the reader to piece together the “war images” (Schaub 37) that are a staple of the novella’s surreal fragmentation. Despite efforts to displace the Holocaust from memory, reminders of the Shoah run rampant — the likes of which range from direct references to the shame of the Germans when a porter describes Christine and her counterparts as “Dirty Boches,” (6)²⁰ to previous echoes of entrapment that are invoked when Herbert exits the hotel room:

He really seemed extraordinarily calm, picking up toothbrushes and jars and tubes 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 his badge of

²⁰ The phrase “Dirty Boches” is a pejorative term. It was often directed toward German soldiers over the course of the First and Second World Wars.

office, his secret credentials. The look on Herbert's face was abstract and soft, as if he had already lived this, or always had thought that he might.

(5)²¹

Indeed, moments of this nature are infused with "reminders abound," (Schaub 35) insofar as the porter's remarks "reinforc[e] his guilt," while also "call[ing] to mind the helplessness of people under arrest" (37).

In addition to the directness of scenes that conjure up distinct linkages to the Second World War, subtlety underlies the very act of journeying on a train from Paris to Southern Germany. Much like the text's emotional atmosphere, the novella's exterior landscape is riddled with allusive hints to the fallout of the war — in Schaub's words, "the train in which Christine and her fellow passengers are endlessly rerouted, without knowing where to, is a mild version of other trains, as clearly conveyed by Christine's allusion to the Holocaust" (35).²² The details surrounding the train's sense of direction, coupled with its literal and figurative parallels to the Shoah are among the story's most haunting allegoric movements — precisely because of the extent to which the characters consciously ignore, but

²¹ This, too, is an instance in which Gallant channels the influence of Kafka on her work. Schaub explains, "As well as reinforcing his guilt, the description calls to mind the helplessness of people under arrest, calling to mind works such as Kafka's *The Trial*" (37). Besner adds that Herbert's docility also reflects "a habitual response to displays of authority," in that "his quiescence is that of one accommodated, acculturated to totalitarian displays of authority, one who has always expected to be 'arreste[d]'" (156).

²² Expanding on the topical implications of a train ride, Besner holds that the trip "is, for Gallant, an atypical excursion into symbolism. The train's meandering course across France and into Germany epitomizes the general aimlessness of contemporary German culture, an aimlessness which has perhaps subverted Germany's determination to carry on with its 'economic miracle'" (151).

are nevertheless aware of the horrors enacted upon the landscape in which they travel. Attention to Gallant's description of the "baked and blind" (20) wasteland reveals that reality informs the trip's unreality — the train goes from Paris to Bietigheim to Backnang to Pegnitz in scenes that "re-present the nightmarish journey home, back from the camps" (Schaub 35). Pegnitz is also a significant destination, as the town — located in Upper Franconia, Bavaria, Germany — is approximately 25 miles away from Nuremberg. Despite the fact that the train does not stop at the precise site of the military tribunals, it undoubtedly passes through the space in which members of the Nazi elite were prosecuted for their involvement in the Holocaust and for carrying out multitudes of war crimes. Such details ultimately quash the notion that the text is strictly a post-war novella, as Gallant's tactical objectives blur the lines between that which preceded and that which followed the rise of the Third Reich, thus placing the past in conjunction with the characters' present so as to highlight the continuity of the problems that gave rise to the Shoah.

Gallant's selection of a train as the characters' sole form of transportation draws yet another line of connection to the Second World War. An obsessive symbol of degradation and authoritarianism, trains are uniquely connotative in a Canadian context. As someone who had previously worked for both the National Film Board and the *Montreal Standard*, Gallant was aware of Canada's reprehensible history of displacement — namely in terms of the way in which the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway resulted in the extinguishing of

Indigenous lands.²³ The suggestive possibilities of trains, then, were sure to translate into her writing. In “The Pegnitz Junction,” the train works on multiple levels to figuratively gesture to the horrors of the Holocaust. Metaphorically, the train and its route remind Gallant’s readership of the structures that were used to transport people to concentration camps over the course of the Nazi genocide. Although the vehicle is often an indicator of linearity, organization, and rationality, Gallant subverts the logical assumptions of her audience by constructing scenes in which characters are left to grapple with “the careless rerouting of trains” (65). This culminates in the final pages of the text, when the expectations of Christine and her counterparts are fundamentally derailed:

[O]nce they had left the waiting room they would have to stand, perhaps for a long time. 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. (89)

As the scene’s emotional undercurrent shows, the train ends up at the central location of a subject that its inhabitants have sought to avoid. Any inclination

²³ Despite being an under-discussed topic in earlier accounts of the era, much has been written about the tragic history behind the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway. For a detailed account of the matter, consult James William Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (2013).

toward linearity is hushed by the “voices bawl[ing] in dialect,” as the characters march “without haste and without looking back” (89) toward a concentration camp.

In a text complete with disruptions of both the moral and the aesthetic variety, few moments are as destabilizing as the novella’s final passage — the thematic implications of which shall be further addressed in Chapter Three. Because the passengers are, in the words of Robertson Davies, “wanting in communication and sympathy,” but nonetheless lack “any real will to achieve these things,” (72) instances of this kind are reliant upon the ability of the reader to channel their understanding of what Schaub describes as, “outside information, on their knowledge of history, to be fully aware of the author’s intentions” (37-38). Clues to the literal significance of the Pegnitz junction itself precede the final allegoric movement. As the train makes its way into Southern Germany, explicit reminders of the recent past become apparent — the conductor, who rarely misses an opportunity to direct orders, instructs the train’s passengers to avoid “a barbed-wire frontier, where someone had been shot to death only a week ago” (55); Christine is warned to leave windows closed due to the recurrence of brushfires, which causes her to “imagin[e] the holocaust they might become” (36); a horde of schoolgirls storm Christine’s compartment (20-21); and a host of “untidy soldiers” prompt memories of the Third Reich:

Their train slowed at an unknown station, then changed its mind and picked up speed, but not before they’d been given a chance to see a

detachment of conscripts of the army of the Federal Republic in their crumpled uniforms and dusty boots and with their long hair hanging in strings. She saw them as she imagined Herbert must be seeing them: small, round-shouldered, rather dark. Blond, blue-eyed genes were on the wane in Europe. (51)

The closing segment of the novella, however, “brings together all of the motifs which have coloured the journey from its beginning” (Besner 166). The significance of the intermingling of past and present is finally confirmed, as Gallant indirectly portrays “a wartime atmosphere charged with menace and confusion” (Besner 166). Conceptions of authority are not only shattered, but are also silenced in snippets that underline the depth of the depravity. Christine witnesses the caricatured “master race” deteriorate before her eyes — the cultural leader loses his spectacles and is rendered “barely recognizable without them,” appearing “insane” (81); Herbert’s command over language is lost as he is merely heard from a distance (89); and the conductor’s plea for mercy — “But I was kind on the train. I let you keep the window open when we went through the fire zone . . . You’ll testify for me, then?” (83) — is not honoured by Christine, who stands up to his antics for once and for all. The desperation of these individuals raises questions about the temporal setting of the novella. Though set in Germany in the mid 1950s, it is certainly beneficial to rethink Gallant’s approach to framing her narrative, as references of this nature directly mirror some of the issues that came to light in the mid 1930s. Responsibility, therefore, is also

impressed upon readers, as they are left to consider the ways that remembering the past continues to cast a shadow upon the lives of characters in the present.

Detached from her lover, Christine's confusion remains widespread, as she admits that she is unsure of what she and little Bert should do.²⁴ But in a sudden instance of certainty, Christine fulfills little Bert's often-repeated request, briefly reading a passage from one of Bonhoeffer's essays, and beginning to tell the child a fictional story regarding the sponge that he carries as a source of company. This fragmented reality, its suggestive capacities, and the ensuing debates that an ending of this nature prompts, is the inconclusive note on which Gallant closes the novella — the ramifications of which are the subject of the next part of this thesis.

²⁴ When asked by little Bert about the way in which they ought to respond to the incertitude that envelops the junction, Christine remarks, "I don't know . . . Go out, or wait here. I'm sorry to be so uncertain" (90).

CHAPTER THREE

The Depth of the Depravity: Youth, Shifting Alliances, and the Question of Hope

“The knowledge of good and evil is therefore separation from God. Only against God can man know good and evil.”

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer

*“ . . . Come, my friends,
’Tis not too late to seek a newer world.”*

— Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Approximately four years after the publication of “The Pegnitz Junction,” Gallant sat down for an interview with Geoff Hancock, the Editor-in-Chief of *Canadian Fiction Magazine*. The exchange was documented in two separate sessions, during which the writers discussed everything from the highs and lows of Canadian literature to Gallant’s illustrious career, and, of course, her understanding of ethical responsibility in the space of Holocaust fiction. Gallant would disclose that, of all her work, “The Pegnitz Junction” had become a personal favourite, in that the novella was the literary equivalent of “explain[ing] something to myself” (Hancock 98). Pressed by Hancock to expand upon the reasons as to why she regarded the story so fondly, Gallant remarked:

Because for once I brought off something I was trying to do. Brought it off to my own satisfaction, I mean. At least up to a point. It is always only up to a point. “Pegnitz” was a story Europeans liked and that I think North Americans did not like much. I think it bored them. But Europeans liked it, and that rather worried me. I would not want to seem remote to people who read in English. All the references in “Pegnitz” are to German history, German literature. Europeans are apt to see them at once. (123)

According to Hancock, the uniquely European setting in which the novella takes place, coupled with its resonance among German audiences was “a good summation of [Gallant’s] own writing up to that point” (123). Better yet, the story’s central metaphor — “a train that hasn’t arrived at the junction to take its passengers home” (123) — was, in the interviewer’s assessment, a particularly

suitable allegory for the German nation in a state of transit, thus explaining its relative success in European contexts.

Indeed, it is unsurprising that the story was well received in a European framework. Published almost three decades after the outset of the Nuremberg trials, Gallant did not hesitate to grapple with some of the most sensitive post-Holocaust anxieties, nor did she shy away from inviting her readership to confront the ways in which fascism's "small possibilities" in people had allowed Europe's trauma to be perpetuated on a widespread basis (Hancock 100). Perhaps what allowed Gallant to maintain such an astutely "pervasive historical sense" (Keefer 163) was her understanding of humanity's capacity for vulnerability — the very quality that had not only been exploited by the Nazis on a horrific scale, but the same feature that would almost definitely continue to cast its shadow upon the world if representations of the Shoah failed to be undertaken with a degree of responsibility. In her discussion with Hancock, she noted that descriptively sensational words had to be minimized in written accounts of the Nazi genocide, "because what the pictures [of the event] are saying is stronger and louder. It must be kept simple" (99).

Far from light reading, the novella's imagery is rich in its gestures to memories of "[t]he Adolf time" (Gallant 71). Its most recurring symbol, a train being endlessly rerouted, serves as an allegorical stand-in for the transition of trauma across borders — which, as in Chapter Two, entails enormous consequences for characters who respond to the atrocities of the past by framing

alternate realities. By extension, the connotative possibilities surrounding the text's children are further telling of yet another haunting suggestion — the story's youth act as a reminder of how trauma is impressed upon younger generations. The schoolgirls who travel home from camp and invade Christine's compartment are one such example of Gallant's willingness to trouble preconceptions of the German master race. As Besner observes, the episode reflects the author's attempt to contrast "Christine's innocent, schoolgirl past" with the fact that "[t]he girls are no longer schoolgirls, but more warlike, more military, and they are also curiously adult" (157). The ramifications of experience overthrow the schoolgirls' presumed innocence, as the "once bossy, once confident little [blonde] girl" is "appraised" by Herbert, who responds to her behaviour "as though she were twenty" (Gallant 20-21).

In the eyes of Christine, everything that is witnessed or imagined acts as a signifier of recent history — the past and the present blend together as each event sparks memories or visions that allow for the fragmentation of linear notions of time and space. Though seemingly unconnected to her journey, Christine's rumination on a family climbing a hill toward a museum-castle is an avenue through which suggestive linkages are drawn between what "the young woman sees" (Hancock 123) and the fallout of the Holocaust. The narrative shift that Gallant employs to describe the young boy's stabbing of Jürgen allows readers to recognize that the passage's indirectness mirrors the unreality of the setting upon which Christine and her counterparts travel. As I have noted in the previous

chapter, the scene's emotional atmosphere is upended from an apparent fairy-tale to a moment of horrifying consequences:

[Jürgen] was ready to cripple the kid with a knee and step on his right hand, but only if he had to. He must have seemed like a great statue to the boy, standing with both arms straight up supporting the carpet. Jürgen brought his knee up too high and too soon; he was used to fighting with men. The kid bent gracefully over the knee and pushed the length of the blade of a kitchen knife above the buckle of Jürgen's belt. (33)

Keefer argues that the “surrealistic kitsch” (175) of the passage contains subtle parallels to the horrors enacted upon younger generations left to struggle with the prospect of living in a post-Auschwitz world. Like Jürgen's readiness to “cripple the kid . . . if he had to,” (33) many of the novella's adults attempt to render children silent through using words and actions that erase memories of previous trauma. Public discourse is centred on contentious images of a German woman while the allegorical implications of the train venturing toward a concentration camp remain untroubled, problematic dialogue concerning the presence of foreign “guest workers” is normative, and Herbert undertakes numerous efforts to hide his child from the facts of German history. In a setting in which adults excuse themselves from any sense of accountability, it is only reasonable for children to take matters into their own hands — as such, younger generations veer toward the edges of revenge, which the boy “gracefully” attains by inserting “a kitchen knife above the buckle of Jürgen's belt” (33).

In a text that is riddled with references to the dangers of failing to assume responsibility for the abhorrence of the Shoah, few examples better represent the risk of distancing children from engaging with the past, present, and future than the character of little Bert. From the start of the novella, Herbert's alternate reality inflicts little Bert's conception of the world around him. Problematic, in this regard, is the extent to which little Bert's father tampers with his son's desire to learn — especially concerning anything that directly or indirectly involves the Second World War or his lover's sexuality. Little Bert's response — or lack thereof — to the naked body of Christine is one of the story's more challenging episodes. Gallant frames the passage in question by describing little Bert's tendency to enter into Herbert and Christine's room over the course of their stay at the hotel. Fearful of the dark, little Bert yearns for the attention of his father, though he only pleads for assistance after "taking a long look at [Christine] before he moved round the bed and began whimpering" (3). Herbert's ensuing response is to immediately conceal the body of his lover: "His first move was always to draw the sheet over Christine, to protect little Bert from the shock of female nakedness. Without a breath of reproach, he would collect his dressing gown, glasses, watch, cigarettes, and lighter and take little Bert by the hand" (4). Little Bert's reaction to exchanges of this nature is often one of guilt, as he tells his father, "I'm sorry" — to which Herbert replies, "It's all right" (4). By morning, the ritual remains unforgotten — Christine "shed[s] her robe" and changes into a dress, while Herbert ensures that "little Bert's head [is] turned the other way" (7).

Yet Christine realizes that the act of shielding little Bert is inconsequential, for “the child had certainly seen all he wanted to night after night” (7). Just a few pages later, little Bert’s head is once again turned away from an image that his father deems shocking. When Herbert witnesses a commemorative plaque at the Paris station in honour of “a time of ancient misery” — that is, the Second World War — he swiftly removes any echoes of the past from his son’s line of sight: “[a]n instinct made him turn little Bert’s head the other way, though the child could barely read in German, let alone French” (9).

The significance of these instances is ambiguous, and in turn is subject to wide-ranging debate. It is worth noting that Christine’s interpretation of the nightly incident — an interaction that is always unspoken — shifts as the story progresses, reflecting “her changing interpretations of little Bert” (Toye). Initially, Christine attributes little Bert’s actions to the innocence which underlines childhood curiosity, remarking, “[l]eaving the passage door unlocked soon turned out to be a trick of little Bert’s — an *innocent* trick; the locks were unlike those he was used to at home and he could not stop fiddling with them” (Gallant 3; emphasis added). As the narrative advances, Christine garners an increased sense of empathy for her lover’s child, slowly forgiving his curiosity: “Little Bert stayed close to Christine and curled his hand tightly around her fingers. She remembered how he had wakened night after night in a *strange* room and found himself *alone* in the dark” (69; emphasis added). But by the novella’s conclusion, Christine calls upon the child to assume accountability for

feigning fear of the unknown. “Don’t be frightened, by the way,” Christine states, discerning that little Bert, “was *not* frightened of anything, though in Paris he had *pretended* to be afraid of the dark” (90; emphasis added). Each return of Christine to her initial unspoken exchange with little Bert is synonymous with her greater understanding of the importance of taking responsibility for creating situations wherein the boy employs false pretenses as a way of garnering the attention of the adults. And although Christine eventually offers little Bert an apology, her acknowledgement of previous shortcomings is met with silence from the child: “[h]e did not reply; living with adults had accustomed him as much to apologies as to promises” (Gallant 87).

Herbert’s rationale for shielding his son from that which he deems shocking is also one of the novella’s more evident uncertainties. The obstruction of little Bert’s view of the commemorative plaque is just one of many instances wherein adults attempt to do away with memories of the Nazi genocide, thus allowing Herbert to frame the Second World War — which concluded approximately a decade prior to the events of Gallant’s story — as a seemingly age-old event. Even more ambiguous, however, is his obsessive habit of hiding little Bert from glimpses of female nudity. The hotel scene merely serves as a precursor to additional moments of discomfort. Herbert apologizes to little Bert in a manner that connotes suggestive linkages to shame (4), which consequently raises the question of why he feels the need to protect his son from the female body. The sentiment surrounding Herbert’s action is almost directly mirrored

toward the end of the novella, when a host of pornographic magazines are on display at the train station. Unlike Herbert, Christine opts to keep the images within little Bert's vision: "Christine saw little Bert looking at a row of pornographic magazines, the sort that were sold everywhere now, and wanted to cover his eyes, but as Herbert had said, one could not protect him forever" (73). The connections that Herbert draws between wanting to protect his son from Germany's deplorability and female nudity ultimately warrants a twofold response. On the one hand, such equivalences may appear to be a peculiar comparison — the only point of similarity between them is Herbert's evasion of responsibility, which in turn causes little Bert's curiosity to remain unrequited. On the other, the pornographication of war and sex is, for some, a detriment to youth — the risk of 'corrupting' innocence serves as the basis upon which Herbert renders the actions similar. In any case, that which is most damaging continues to be ignored until the final pages of the text — the inherent shock of arriving at a concentration camp reveals the novella's adults to be united in their complicity in failing to responsibly remember the iniquities of the past.²⁵

²⁵ It should be noted that the novella's ending is further reflective of the degree to which the text deconstructs linear conceptions of time and space. The final allegoric movement, and some of the events leading to it, ought to be seen as a fragmentation of linear time, as the ending does not mark the conclusion of a conventional train ride, but alternatively serves as a moment in which the past is brought into the present — or a scene wherein the present becomes the very past that adults have attempted to forget. The disembarking from the train occurs in the 'now' of the text, but the novella's spatial setting remains ambiguous — the unreality of time mirrors the unreality of the events that occur before the characters' eyes.

In addition to shielding little Bert from topics that he renders inappropriate, Herbert often makes promises to his child that lack in both substance and seriousness. The inherent unfairness that underlies the power dynamic between father and son is made apparent toward the beginning of the novella, when Herbert reassures little Bert that they will have lunch at “a two-star restaurant at the Gare de l’Est,” under the condition that the boy behaves himself throughout the train ride (7). Christine recognizes that Herbert’s promise masks truth, for he employs complex language that little Bert is unable to understand: “At Strasbourg they would have time for a quick lunch, and little Bert had better eat . . . because the German train would not have a restaurant car, Herbert went on calmly. His actual words were, ‘Because there will be no facilities for eating on the second transport’” (7-8).²⁶ Shrewdly, Christine identifies Herbert’s bluff, but nevertheless fails to call the attention of her lover or his child to the incongruity of the promise that is unfairly negotiated:

Christine thought that Herbert’s information left out a great deal. Little Bert did not know what a two-star restaurant was, and would certainly have refused every dish set before him had he been taken to one. Also, the appalling schedule Herbert had just described meant that the boy would

²⁶ As I noted in Chapter Two, Gallant’s references to transportation are dually connotative. So while readers may be inclined to interpret Herbert’s comment as a simple gesture to an avenue of passage, the other implication of his utterance is telling of a darker undertone — a guarded allusion, that is, to the passengers’ transportation to a concentration camp.

have nothing to eat or drink from about eleven in the morning until past his bedtime. (8)

For little Bert, the challenge of comprehending the adults' use of complicated rhetoric is further heightened by the fact that Herbert and Christine spend much of their time speaking French. Though not trained in the specifics of the language, little Bert attempts to garner the awareness of the adults by stating one of his father's often-used phrases:

When the conductor came by to check their tickets little Bert suddenly repeated a French phrase of Herbert's, which was, '*Oh, en quel honneur?*' Everyone who heard it smiled, except Christine; she knew he had not meant to be funny, though Herbert believed the child had a precocious sense of humour. (10)

The expression, which translates to either 'to what end?' or 'for what purpose?' is ironic in each of the contexts in which it is used — in part because of the irresponsibility of its most frequent speaker, as well as the confusion that informs little Bert's engagement with the set of words. That little Bert attempts to make use of a phrase of which he apparently has little to no understanding speaks to the complexities that underlie the employment of humorous speech-acts by both Gallant and the novella's characters. Despite her silence, Christine takes issue with the laughter of her fellow adults — not only recognizing the root of little Bert's discomfort, but also discerning his father's inability to respond appropriately to the child's need for a degree of companionship.

The more general question of the extent of little Bert's grasp of language is another subject of multifaceted interpretation — particularly due to the inconstancy that informs his application of spoken discourse. Frequently ignored by Herbert and Christine, little Bert yearns for camaraderie, which causes him to use a sponge from the hotel as a source of community. His adult counterparts initially oppose little Bert's decision to name the sponge "Bruno," with Herbert going so far as to express his frustration, referring to the item as "that damned sponge" (Gallant 10). In spite of her annoyance, Christine attempts to play along with little Bert, but her efforts to relate to the child are met with reminders of the adults' unrelatability. Herbert, for example, rejects Christine's humorous response to a question of his son's, remarking, "Don't . . . [c]hildren can't understand sarcasm" (10). Nonetheless, little Bert manages to see through both Christine and Herbert's sardonic responses to his preoccupation with the sponge. When Christine sarcastically asks, "Is Bruno a bear or a boy?" Herbert replies, "A male cub, I imagine" (18). Frustrated by the mocking tone of the adults, little Bert remains insistently aware of Bruno's nature: "'It's a sponge,' said the offended child. He threw it down and went out to where the bearded man was still gazing at the dull landscape. All this was only half a gesture, for he did not know what to do next" (18).

Although little Bert's comprehension of language is subject to debate, such exchanges raise the question of whether the boy is sufficiently more perceptive of

the society's emotional atmosphere than the adult passengers.²⁷ When Christine tries to grant little Bert's request for a story about Bruno and his siblings — which she begins by stating, “Bruno had five brothers. All five were named Georg. But Georg was pronounced five different ways in the family, so there was no mistake” — Herbert is quick to brush the tale aside, remarking, “Christine, *please* . . . It's silly. The child is not an idiot” (53). While the adults banter, little Bert responds in a way that underscores one of the novella's central problems, as he tells Christine, “You're not reading” (54). As scenes of this nature show, little Bert's curiosity, coupled with his tendency to annoy his adult counterparts, serves as an allegorical gesture to, as Toye puts it, the “future journey of the German people and humanity in general as a question mark, particularly in terms of the *generations born after the war*” (Toye; emphasis added). In a setting in which the only constant for grief-stricken adults is a quality of inconstancy — an inability, that is, to assume responsibility in recounting the horrors of the past — the innocent requests of Herbert's child remind both characters and readers alike of the importance of developing avenues of resistance to attempts to consciously

²⁷ Toye gestures to the implications of this prospect by pointing to several passages that place “Herbert's view of language” in opposition to little Bert's (Toye). When the conductor aggressively prods little Bert's sponge — and in turn asks the child, “What have you got there? . . . Who said you could have it?” — Christine replies by echoing her lover's sentiment: “Don't use that tone with the child . . . Children don't always understand games” (83). Little Bert's ensuing response is telling of his acute sense of awareness, as he protests: “Yes, I do” (83). Shortly after, little Bert once again corrects Christine's mischaracterization of Bruno. When she tells the conductor, “We have every right to sit where we choose, and the child has a right to his toy,” little Bert does not hesitate to point out her error: “Sponge . . . Not toy” (83).

forget previous injustices. In spite of maintaining that “[t]he child is not an idiot,” (53) the novella’s adults consistently mistake little Bert’s use of French, along with his naming of a sponge and desire to learn as youthful preoccupations — which, as we shall see, is a self-serving dismissal that misses the point.

While the adults in little Bert’s life are the driving forces behind evasions of memory, their failures are a byproduct of the “language community” (Toye) that envelops post-Holocaust Europe. The structural dynamic that is set into motion between the story’s primary characters and authority figures speaks to the contrasting manner in which Herbert and Christine react to displays of authority — namely “displays of powers, to threats, orders and Fascis[m]” (Besner 156) — which echoes the underlying bedlam that ran rampant in postwar Germany. Although Herbert’s behaviour reveals that he has been conditioned to naturally expect that he will be arrested, Christine’s responses to unchecked power are more passionate than those of her lover. When the porter orders the trio to exit their hotel room — during which he bellows phrases such as, “Stop the noise! Take all your belongings out of here!” and “It is too late. . . . Too late for noise. Take everything that belongs to you and clear out” (5) — Christine does not hesitate to express her frustration. Unlike Herbert, who merely makes blanket promises to write letters of complaint “to the Guide Michelin and the Tourist Office,” Christine confronts the night worker by calling him “a filthy little swine of a dog of a bully” (6). Christine’s vehement reaction, though ineffective, foreshadows yet another instance in which she challenges a powerful individual —

the train conductor. After being terrorized by his behaviour for most of the journey, Christine declines the conductor's request for her to testify before his superiors (83).²⁸ As a result, he is left to "waddl[e] away" from Christine, "either because he was anxious to show he was still the harmless creature he had been on the train, or because she had alarmed him and he wanted to escape" (84). The fundamental instability, however, of the "language community" (Toye) in question is not limited to the conduct of Christine's powerful companions, but is alternatively a staple of the society's broader application of language discourse. Literal signs "become detached from referents" (Toye) during the train ride, as a trolley vendor claiming to sell "Coca-Cola" is revealed to only be offering "a tepid local drink," with "no ice, no cups, and so few straws that he was reluctant to give any away," (24) while a door marked with a "Do Not Open" inscription is opened by Herbert (78). In a scene that mirrors the sense of derailment that defines the passengers' journey, Herbert, Christine, and little Bert come face to face with a sign bearing the words, "Coburg-Pegnitz" — though the notice hangs in an upside down manner (78). The unreliability of the "language community" (Toye) eventually takes its toll on its most vulnerable members — little Bert grows accustomed to the frequency with which negotiations are broken, as Christine realizes that he "seem[s] content with promises" (57).

²⁸ The conductor's request for Christine to testify before his superiors is yet another instance in which linear conceptions of time are collapsed. In this case, his reference to testimony is an unmistakable allusion to the Nuremberg trials.

If the novella's adults and the "language community" (Toye) in which they reside are complicit in failing to collectively remember past atrocities, how, then, does Gallant configure a message of hope? In spite of the fact that the overwhelming majority of the story is rather desolate, Gallant channels the suggestive possibility of promise for the future through her representation of the shifting dynamic between Christine and little Bert. While insufficient communication forms the basis of an ongoing generational divide that plagues postwar Europe, Christine and little Bert show signs of blurring this detachment. The aforementioned instances in which Christine is left to grapple with the prospect of little Bert glancing upon her naked body highlight the extent to which her view of the child changes — not only does she reach a point wherein she begins to empathize with the boy's curiosities, but she also goes so far as to afford him an apology. Yet the question of what Christine expresses sorrow for remains unanswered. Little Bert's claim — "You never finished a story" — is uninterrupted by the train's adults in the novella's final movement, but Christine's response — "I realize that. I'm sorry" — remains purposefully vague (87). Could Christine's despondency reflect, as Toye intimates, "an apology to the next generation for the war itself — despite the fact that the narrator is careful to indicate that Christine, like little Bert, was born after the war was over?" (Toye). Or is her guilt a consequence of a much more direct shortcoming — her recurring failure, that is, to answer to the child's request for a story?

Perhaps the most central feature of the evolving relationship between Christine and little Bert is that of the boy's tendency to remind his father's lover of the importance of reading. Among Gallant's critics, Christine's eventual — and uncharacteristically decisive — decision to tell the child a story is regarded as a watershed moment, as the act of reading serves as a potential indicator of her willingness to responsibly engage with history and memory. Scholarly accounts of the novella, however, are divided in their interpretation of the degree to which such gestures are synonymous with a promise of hope. Describing Christine's book of Bonhoeffer's essays as "her shield against unpleasant realities," Schaub argues that the story's ending is the equivalent of an epiphany, which is brought about by Christine's newfound readiness to resume the tale that Herbert had initially interrupted (43-45). A sure sign that Gallant has "suggestively announc[ed] the change," (45) Schaub holds, is Christine's ensuing ability to overcome her reluctance to "make up her mind," (89) which is shown through her care for the child:

With the new perspective gained . . . she is brought to decide what turn her life should take. She resolves to stop pretending — a characteristic of all the characters. She no longer thinks of putting up a show for propriety's sake; she starts acting as a true mother would, feeling sincerely sorry for the child's discomfort and herself comforted by his presence. (Schaub 45)

While Christine's resolution "to stop pretending" (45) is made apparent when she reads two lines from Bonhoeffer's book, Schaub pushes this assertion further by

maintaining that the moment in which she closes the collection of essays denotes that she “has gathered enough material to have a clearer picture of her own country and a better idea about her identity” (45). As she turns a blind eye to the “interference” around her, Christine not only gains control of that which she has long hoped for — an opportunity, that is, “to have the last word” (Gallant 90) — but also establishes command over the direction of her future. “[T]he novella,” Schaub claims, “ends on a positive note,” (47) as Christine’s refusal to be caught up in the chaos that envelops the junction mirrors the sense of maturation that comes to define the conclusion of her journey. The train, therefore, is not just a literal avenue of departure, but is also representative of the figurative means through which Christine “is no longer eager to take the train of social life with its norms, insincere feelings, and failed communication” (Schaub 47).

While Besner’s reading of the novella’s final allegoric movement is also rooted in the belief that the arrival at Pegnitz “brings together all of the motifs which have coloured the journey from its beginning,” his argument is predicated on the notion that the story ends on an “unresolved close” (166-67).

Acknowledging that the intermingling of past and present allows for the recreation of “a wartime atmosphere” riddled with “menace and confusion,” Besner finds hope in the prospect of little Bert emerging as the chief recipient of Christine’s “sphere of influence” (166).²⁹ Like Schaub, Besner regards the act of

²⁹ It should be noted that Besner also highlights the fact that, over the course of the story, Herbert is the primary obstacle to the development of the relationship between his child and his lover. Although Christine understands that the purpose

reading as the main source of unity between child and adult, paying close attention to the way in which each respective individual demonstrates a need “for support and for human contact” (166). Whereas the beginning of the novella is marked by moments in which little Bert instantaneously gravitates toward Christine when she opens Bonhoeffer’s book to read — an action that is often interrupted by the constant “interference” of “information,” as well as the disparaging remarks of her lover — the story’s conclusion plays host to a reversal of roles (Besner 166). The feeling of little Bert’s “comforting breath on her arm” eases Christine, who stresses the importance of their newfound companionship: “Whatever happens . . . we must not become separated. We must never leave each other” (82). Yet in spite of the underlying forces that bring together the very characters whose relationship is often defined by emotional distance — thus paralleling the exterior sense of detachment across generations left to live in a post-Holocaust world — Besner troubles the idea of a uniquely positive ending to the novella. In his view, Christine’s final gestures are purposefully vague — “she and little Bert have reached a momentary respite from the confusion surrounding them,” (168) but the ramifications of temporary relief remain unclear. Expanding upon the notion that the story’s conclusion is, in fact, the instance wherein

of their holiday is to strengthen the relationship between herself and little Bert, Besner draws attention to Herbert’s attempts to undermine Christine’s willingness to tell the boy a story: “each time she begins to read, Herbert has cut her off, complaining that her inventions are too silly, too military, too imaginary, all potentially harmful to little Bert” (166).

Gallant is at her “most ambiguous,” Besner balances Christine and little Bert’s closeness with the fallout of the scene around them:

Christine is not docile enough, not meek enough to file onto another train. Nor is it clear at the end of the story whether their next train is at the Pegnitz junction; Christine hears Herbert in the distance, trying to get information, she imagines. She does confront the conductor when he tries to intimidate little Bert, and her appeals to the child are positive gestures toward relationship. Fittingly, the ending is the most ambiguous, the most open-ended of all in this book. (168-69)

Besner’s interpretation of the novella’s ending as appropriately “open-ended” (169) perhaps helps to paint a more suitable portrait of the seriousness with which Gallant attempts “to write *the explanation* of something [she] did not [her]self understand” (Hancock 99). Unwilling to conclude on a note of concrete resolution, Gallant marries promise with echoes of trauma, balancing signs of newfound camaraderie with the suggestive capacities of unsettled commotion — the connotative aspects of which imply, in Besner’s words, “the imminent departure of prisoner transports” (167).

Building upon a similar line of inquiry, Toye also underscores the significance of Christine’s efforts to read. Drawing attention to the fundamental differences between those who seek to forget the past and those who try to remember it, Toye — like Schaub and Besner — emphasizes the moment in which the characteristically indecisive Christine finally decides to act as a turning point

in the novella. Rather than serving as the underpinnings of a political commentary, the opening of Bonhoeffer's book is the avenue through which a bond is crafted — "an ethical connection," Toye explains, "between a young woman and a little boy through the act of reading" (Toye). The creation of an ethical space of engagement becomes Gallant's representative answer to the main problem that hovers over the novella's characters — the question, that is, of how healing ought to be garnered in a world which is seemingly devoid of any inclination toward reciprocity. "[A]ttention to storytelling" is presented as a mechanism of resistance to attempts to displace the past from public memory, as the newfound "sharing of language and history between two persons" — or Christine and little Bert, respectively — allows for the consciousness of both characters and readers to shift toward "hope for healing and the future" (Toye). Instead of attempting to inscribe an ulterior meaning upon the novella's closing segment, Toye argues that the most literal connotations surrounding Christine's decision to read to the child — and the suggestive implications for life after Auschwitz that an act of this variety entails — are the most significant features of Gallant's work. Through raising difficult questions "about history and memory, about ethics, and above all about language," Gallant asks readers to responsibly engage with representative trauma, offering "the importance of reading" as a sign of promise in an age in which hope is all but absent (Toye).

In her analysis of the ways in which the ethics of reading acts as a staple that binds Gallant's fiction together, Karen E. Smythe observes that although

“The Pegnitz Junction” is “quite resistant to interpretation,” the reader, nevertheless, plays a crucial role in condemning “the extremes of sentimentality and irresponsible forgetting” (90). Exploring how memory is used and abused by the novella’s characters, Smythe writes:

Gallant requires the reader to decipher the ‘junction’ of the history and fiction, the past and the present as posited by the text. . . . 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; emphasis added)

Indeed, much of the scholarship surrounding the story is centred on highlighting the degree of responsibility with which Gallant conducts her craft — a prospect that, by extension, requires her readership to place themselves “in both the past and the present” (Hatch 37) in an ethically accountable manner.³⁰ Often noted, but somewhat understudied among Gallant’s critics, however, is the question of *why* the collection of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s essays is the primary object of material possession that characters either gloss or obsess over — as well as the item that eventually bridges the gap between Christine and little Bert. A German pastor and theologian, Bonhoeffer was martyred by the Nazis for his efforts to resist the calls of the Third Reich. His *Letters and Papers From Prison* (1943-45)

³⁰ To echo Ronald Hatch: “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” (37).

is an argument in favour of direct action, inviting readers to accept responsibility by marrying accountability for the past with faithful courageousness — a call for unity that directly threatens the sphere of displacement which Herbert inhabits. In Besner's view, Herbert's unwillingness to give due consideration to Christine's book of Bonhoeffer's prison papers and theological writings is synonymous with his "demands for a relationship liberated from the past" (164). Not only does Herbert wish for his lover to rid herself of any connection to her fiancé's examination — a requirement "for students of theology who have failed their year" — but he also longs for a world wherein echoes of past trauma are entirely removed, sarcastically remarking, "That accounts for the Bonhoeffer. Well. Our Little Christian. What good does it do him if *you* read?" (Gallant 45).³¹ Toye also maintains that Gallant's selection of Bonhoeffer as a subject of rumination "is highly symbolic," for the Protestant priest "stood up against the Nazis and ended up dying in a concentration camp" (Toye) during a time when many theologians were reluctant as ever to act. Most puzzling, for Toye, is the question of why Gallant "perhaps surprisingl[y] undermines Bonhoeffer's — or rather, his text's — alignment with action" (Toye). She takes up this point of confusion by attempting to rationalize Christine's line of thought, arguing that the indecisive character

³¹ According to Besner, the fact that Christine's fiancé is preparing for an examination for individuals "who have failed their year" (Gallant 37) is especially telling of the novella's emotional atmosphere: "When Christine explains to Herbert that she is reading the book for an examination, the theology student's test *becomes hers, and Herbert's, and Germany's*. And when Christine explains that this test is for those who have 'failed their year,' her comment resonates beyond the particular situation, *extending to a general failure to 'pass' Bonhoeffer's rigorous test*" (Besner 164; emphasis added).

succeeds in deeming “‘speech-acts’ of theology as inadequate for taking into account the present” (Toye). Consequently, Toye concludes her reflection on Gallant’s use of Bonhoeffer by expanding upon the notion that Christine finally succeeds in making a decision: “Christine’s rejection of these words suggests that while the man Bonhoeffer himself may have acted, theological explanations represented by his essays do not adequately explain evil and humanity post-Holocaust” (Toye).

While Besner and Toye identify that Christine’s copy of the German theologian’s book serves as a symbolic reminder of the need to resist the Nazi state through the act of reading, a closer examination of Bonhoeffer’s character reveals the extent to which his scholarship was partially encompassed by the depth of the depravity that had assumed control of European society. Although few would refute the notion that, in the words of James Carroll, Bonhoeffer’s overarching legacy is one of “a true her[o] for all,” (29) his famous essay entitled “The Church and the Jewish Question” (1933) is especially problematic for scholars of the Shoah — particularly because of the fact that it is marked by a quality of supersessionism.³² In *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews* (2001), Carroll unpacks the Roman Catholic Church’s part in perpetuating anti-Semitism across a global scale. Dismissing the argument that anti-Judaism among Christians was the primary driving force that led to the Nazi genocide,

³² Bonhoeffer’s supersessionism is rarely — if at all — acknowledged in critical responses to Gallant’s novella. While I have drawn upon the work of Besner, Toye, and Schaub, respectively, none of the responses in question have addressed the implicit anti-Semitism that Bonhoeffer’s essay entails.

Carroll holds that the Church's capacity to succumb to "Jew hatred" was the fundamental basis upon which the Third Reich set its groundwork into motion (7). One of the chief factors behind "the two-thousand-year-old conflict between the two religions," Carroll argues, is the Christian doctrine of supersessionism — the notion that "the Jesus movement, as it evolved into the Church, effectively replaced the Jews as the chosen people of God" (58). Originating "from the Latin *supersedere*, meaning 'to sit upon,'" supersessionism is predicated on the idea that the "New Testament 'sat upon' the Old Testament, the New Covenant upon the Old, and so on," which in turn not only explains "the structure of Jewish-Christian conflict," but also "proves how deeply rooted in Judaism the Church is" (58).

A sure sign of the degree to which the "Christian response to Jews . . . is defined by its ambivalence," Carroll maintains that the "mental habit of supersessionism" ensures that the Christian tradition "set[s] itself above Israel" (98). The potential implications of replacement theology are not only troublesome for writers that subscribe to supersessionist beliefs, but are also problematic for readers of their work — especially among audiences who willingly or heedlessly fail to unpack the specifics of such a "division between old and new" (133). The question of Bonhoeffer's influence on Gallant's text, then, ought to be undertaken with a more nuanced perspective in mind, as his scholarship "employed traditional anti-Judaic language typical of the Lutheran churches" (Hockenos 21). Matthew D. Hockenos' *A Church Divided: German Protestants*

Confront the Nazi Past (2004) points out that although Bonhoeffer was not necessarily anti-Semitic, his work “advocate[d] the conversion of Jews to Christianity, since he believed that only through faith in Jesus as the Messiah was salvation possible” (21). While Bonhoeffer actively opposed the “implementation of racial legislation in the Church,” and in turn argued that Christians should assume responsibility by assisting individuals who suffered at the hands of fundamentally anti-Semitic bodies of laws, his writing nonetheless illustrates “just how deeply ingrained anti-Judaic thinking was” (21). His aforementioned paper, “The Church and the Jewish Question,” is revealing of the influence of supersessionism on levels of Christian thought:

The Church of Christ has never lost sight of the thought that the ‘chosen people’ who nailed the redeemer of the world to the cross must bear the curse for its actions through a long history of suffering. . . . But the history of the suffering of this people, loved and punished by God, stands under the sign of the final homecoming of Israel [the Jews] to its God. And this homecoming happens in the conversion of Israel to Christ. . . . The conversion of Israel, that is to be the end of the people’s period of suffering. (qtd. in Hockenos 21)

Have we, then, a portrait of a man who, in the words of Toyé, “himself may have acted” (Toyé) — or, as Carroll writes, was “a true her[o] for all” (29)? In a novella that is seemingly tied together by a quality of *disorder* — wherein characters and readers alike are asked to reorient their thoughts so as to accommodate the

unreality against which the text is set — it should not be surprising that idealized figures are themselves subject to political and religious ambivalence. That Gallant opts to remind readers of the importance of assuming responsibility for the past through recurring gestures to the legacy of one of Germany’s most inherently tragic heroes — an individual who was not anti-Semitic per se, but still a subscriber to a core set of anti-Judaic beliefs — is a deeply symbolic note on which the story ends. The expectations of Gallant’s readership are again subverted, as Christine recites aloud from Bonhoeffer’s work — “The knowledge of good and evil is therefore separation from God. Only against God can man know good and evil” — only to close the book and counsel little Bert: “Well . . . no use going on with that. Don’t be frightened, by the way” (90). Whether Christine’s abrupt dismissal of the German theologian’s essay is a result of a need to protect the child from the dangers of supersessionist thought or a result of a genuine sense of ignorance for the act of reading remains unclear, as Christine resumes the story about little Bert’s sponge that her lover — now figuratively and literally distanced — had previously interrupted: “Bruno had five brothers, all named Georg. But Georg was pronounced five different ways in the family, so there was no confusion. They were called the Goysh, the Yursh, the Shorsh . . .” (90). While it is plausible that the reader may not be at ease with the lack of resolve to the novella’s conclusion, the outset of Christine’s tale is synonymous with the birth of hope, as the story’s principal character ultimately seeks to establish a connection with the child — despite the “interference” of the setting in

which they find themselves.³³ Ronald Hatch suggests that Christine's narrative conjures up linkages to "the brotherhood of man," yet "[m]ost readers . . . will see Christine's action as a retreat to the abstract realm of mind, of reason, when the requirement is a confrontation with the present moment" (103).³⁴ Accordingly, the reader is denied closure, as the ambiguousness of the text's emotional atmosphere is more apparent than ever. With repeated echoes of entrapment, connections to community are drawn — the "small possibilities" (Hancock 100) for hope thus spell the ending of Christine and little Bert's story. But nevertheless, the imminence of unsettled commotion, coupled with the inevitability of their deaths is the connotative medium through which Gallant brings the novella's final allegoric movement to a close. Like the rest of the text, the last page of "The Pegnitz Junction" concludes with a disruption of linear inclinations toward resolution, in that the impending departure of prisoners suggests a looming collapse of time and space — a past that is brought into the present or a present which has essentially become the past — as the Holocaust is rendered an inescapable feature of the human condition.

³³ The story also has its roots "in Christine's own personal history" (Toye). Christine insists that "this story is based in reality," drawing upon memories of her father to argue her point (Toye): "Oh, God, Herbert, you are the one confused. My father knew them. They existed. Only one survived the war, the Yursh. He was already old when I met him. He might be dead now" (Gallant 54).

³⁴ Hatch expands upon this view by examining the uniqueness of the context in which Christine tells little Bert a story: "For a moment, the reader wonders whether Christine is not reaching out to the child in a rare gesture of kindness. Then one realizes she does this at the very moment when action is needed to catch the train. From a liberal viewpoint, it might be seen as a positive gesture, but the story, I suggest, has radicalized us well beyond such liberal, utopian possibilities" (103).

CONCLUSION

“In an age when memory is under attack, critical reading becomes both a source of hope and a tool of resistance. Reading critically is fundamental to connecting the past to the present and viewing the present as a window into those horrors of the past that must never be repeated.”

— Henry A. Giroux

In this thesis, I have attempted to grapple with the ways in which Mavis Gallant's "The Pegnitz Junction" offers an aesthetic response to the Shoah that not only invites readers to consider the ramifications of humanity's capacity to preserve and erase historical memory, but also prompts them to ponder the ethics of accountability in representational accounts of generational trauma. Through its employment of an extensively allusive language, in its blurring of linear notions of time and space, in its ongoing experimentation with the dynamic between substance and subject matter, and in its reconceptualization of the limitations of the Canadian novel, Gallant's text refuses to provide logical explanations for the Holocaust, which in turn causes her readership to ask the question of how human beings should respond to the iniquities of the past. Responsibility is what ultimately lies at the central root of this recurring point of contemplation — of which Gallant denies readers concrete answers, as well as any sense of closure.

How one ought to respond to the story is an issue that has divided critics since its publication in 1973. Keefer draws upon the responses of two notable authors — George Woodcock and William Pritchard, respectively — to highlight the multidimensionality of the literary community's reception to the space that the novella occupies in the field of Canadian Holocaust fiction. Writing for *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, the former argued that the text's "decentred detachment" and "bizarre playfulness" would "give many readers difficulty" (Woodcock 101) — a charge that was echoed by the latter, whose review in *The*

New York Times held that the novella “is too clever, too oblique, too arty, for its own moral and human good” (Pritchard 4). Attempting to clarify the concerns of the aforementioned critiques, Keefer proposes a reexamination of Gallant’s piece, arguing that an alternative line of inquiry should inform considerations of the narrative:

Perhaps our responses can best be guided by asking a question that shifts ground. What does one make of Gallant’s reason for writing about Germany and the Germans as she does in this novella — her assertion that ‘the victims [of Nazism], the survivors [of the camps] would probably not be able to tell us anything, except for the description of life at point zero. If we wanted to find out how and why this happened it was the Germans we had to question . . . The victims, the survivors, that is, could tell us what had happened to them but not why?’ (177)

As Keefer’s comments show, perhaps the true challenge that the novella poses is not necessarily rooted in its ability to detach readers from any sense of normalcy, nor is it predicated on the “harmonious equilibrium of form and content” (Clement 75) that is struck from the outset of the story’s opening pages. Rather, it is Gallant’s *rationale* for writing Holocaust literature — for constructing a novella that “literally throws us off course by giving us the other side of the coin — the Germans, not the victims of their former government” (Keefer 179-80) — in a way that suspends conventional expectations that ought to serve as a topic of rumination among her critics.

For the most part, “The Pegnitz Junction” blurs the lines between the issues that impacted Germany both prior to and after the Second World War. Deconstructions of linear time and spatial sense prompt the creation of a fragmented reality — characters operate within the ‘now’ of the text, while surrealistic indirectness causes a tension to be maintained between the passengers’ journey and the “Adolf time” (71). The past and present overlap in a manner that allows Gallant to ask difficult questions of the reader — “horrific revelations” (Keefer 179) are kept at a minimum, as the depth of the depravity is found in extremism’s suggestive capacities in seemingly typical interactions. The atypicality of the Shoah arises out of the ease with which illogical hatred and fear is rendered normalized by the story’s characters. As such, the novella reconceptualizes the conventional Holocaust narrative — it does not portray the event as a sensationalized tale of good and evil, but alternatively affords readers a horrifying window into fascism’s “small possibilities” (Hancock 100) in ordinary people.

En quel honneur?

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