



Home Truths

Mavis Gallant

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In *Home Truths*, Mavis Gallant draws us into the tricky labyrinth of human behaviour, while offering readers her unique, clear-eyed vision of Canadians both at home and abroad. Ranging in time and place from small-town Quebec during the Depression, to Geneva and Paris in the 1950s, to contemporary Vancouver Island, these stories explore the remorseless cruelty of children, the tensions that affect all families, the dangerous but endearing naïveté of young girls in love with Europe, and the terrible distances that divide people who love each other. And in the celebrated “Linnet Muir” stories, Gallant draws on her own experiences to portray a sensitive and alarmingly perceptive young girl growing up in Montreal in the 1930s and 1940s. Incisive, darkly humorous, and compassionate, *Home Truths* is a vibrant collection of stories from one of our finest writers.

Home Truths Details

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Author : Mavis Gallant

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From Reader Review Home Truths for online ebook

Jennifer says

The introduction hooked me - I knew I was going to love this author. When posing the question "what is a Canadian", she surmises that it must be anyone who has a good reason to believe they are one! Short stories suited my busy life that week and these were great.

Miranda Bavdaz says

yawwwwn, zzzzzz. I kept leaving it, forcing myself to return, boring, couldn't finish it

Carla says

Among the best short stories I've read ever.

J.C. Anderson says

Home Truths, Sixteen Stories by Mavis Gallant

Mavis Gallant's early life conditioned her to know these home truths inside and out. Born in Montreal to an American mother and a British father, she was essentially abandoned at four when she was sent to boarding school. The rest of her childhood was lived without a family.

Therefore, I think it safe to say, the parents in her short stories tend to be incapable of love, neglectful, or just plain stupid. She said this about her mother: "I had a mother who should not have had children, and it's as simple as that."

In a 2012 CBC Radio interview, she described her father, a failed painter, as "the great empty chair," She told The New York Times: "In many, many of the things I write, someone has vanished. And it's often the father. And there is often a sense that nothing is very safe."

Her father died when she was only 10. When her mother married again and left Canada, she placed Mavis in the care of a guardian. The little girl always believed her father would eventually rescue come her. Never told that he was dead, she waited for him for several years. She said she never recovered from that grief. After attending 17 different schools in Canada and the US (she hated every one), Ms. Gallant's breakthrough came in 1950 when The New Yorker published her first story. Thus encouraged, she challenged herself to surrender herself entirely to her art. She gave herself over to a writer's life in Paris. This sacrifice meant never marrying again (she had a husband only briefly during her time in Canada, but he was promptly divorced). She never bore children. As a result of her unencumbered and expatriated life alone, she knew how to make us feel intimately familiar with her alienated, dislocated, lonely characters. So displaced herself, she was able to always give us a powerful sense of place, whether the story is set in Montreal, Paris, or Geneva.

Every Gallant short story is a deep meditation. The New Yorker published 116 of her stories for more than 40 years. We subscribers embraced her tales of life's gentle, cruel, tragic, funny paradoxes. Each one is like an exquisitely detailed needlepoint. Told in exquisite detail, they are threaded with ironies to reveal lives complicated by thwarted dreams.

One of my favorites of the sixteen is “The Ice Wagon Going Down the Street,” a story about two people losing each other. Listen to these randomly selected words from that story:

“Let me,” she said. He was fumbling with the key, trying to lock the car. She took the key without impatience and locked the door on the driver’s side; and then, to show Peter she reassured him and was not afraid of wasting her life on her beauty, she took his arm and they walked in the snow down a street and around a corner to the apartment house where the Burleighs lived. They were, and are, a united couple. They were afraid of the party, and each of them knew it. When they walk together, holding arms, they give each other whatever each can spare.

Or this, also randomly chosen for your ear:

“In a big family, if you want to be alone, you have to get up before the rest of them. You get up early in the morning in the summer and it’s you, you, once in your life alone in the universe. You think you know everything that can happen ... Nothing is ever like that again.”

I cannot think of another story teller who could so gracefully evoke with great wit and perception, no sentimentality, the simple lives most of us lead, lives that are in truth scarily complicated ... other than, perhaps, her fellow Canadian, Alice Munro. (And I mustn’t neglect Lorrie Moore - *Bark: Stories* – with her terrific wit and sympathy for her characters.) Yet, Ms. Gallant’s examinations go deeper. In our own lives, we may deny the pain of separation, the risks that come with compassion, the fragility of family relationships, and the frustrating distances that divide us from those we love and need. But reading these incredibly rich stories about strangers made familiar, we are forced to face up to these home truths about our hidden lives.

Although she wrote two novels as well as nonfiction, she much preferred short story writing, saying, “They have a natural size — length, I mean — that arrives with them.” She also said they possess an insistence that lives may be unfulfilling, happiness in love impossible and security a distant dream, yet everything, no matter how grave, holds the possibility for laughter.

“I can’t imagine writing anything that doesn’t have humor,” Ms. Gallant once said. “Look at the fits of laughter that you get at a funeral, at a wake. It’s emotion, and in a way it’s relief that you’re alive.”

Ms. Gallant earned many literary prizes, including the PEN/Nabokov Award in 2004. She died on February 11, 2014, at her home in Paris. She was 91.

Despair not. There is so much more of her to discover, so much more to learn from her. I turn next to *The New York Review of Books* three collections: “*Paris Stories*,” 2002 (selected by Michael Ondaatje); “*Varieties of Exile*,” 2003 (selected by Russell Banks); and “*The Cost of Living: Early and Uncollected Stories*” (2009). I recommend that you do the same.

Buried In Print says

This review was deleted following Amazon's purchase of GoodReads.

The review can still be viewed via LibraryThing, where my profile can be found [here](#).

I'm also in the process of building a database at Booklikes, where I can be found [here](#).

If you read/liked/clicked through to see this review here on GR, many thanks.

Frank says

Pivotal collection in her oeuvre, and a must even for Gallant fans who already have her *Collected stories*,

since over half of the stories in this collection were not reprinted in that book.

Lesliemae says

I gave this book a THIRD chance over the weekend. After plowing my way through the first section of the book I chanced upon Linnet Muir. These stories were authentic and witty. At time I found myself laughing out loud, and enjoyed each story immensely.

Inscription:

p. 364: "nothing 1/2 hearted the truth with a capital "T""

"What is truth?" Pilate asked

"Your word is truth" answered Jesus

What does that answer mean?

My 32 year old brain decided last month that the "T"ruth be it religious, political, journalistic or otherwise is not out there - not for us.

Lisa says

Mavis Gallant is hands down my favorite author. Now, having read a second collection of short stories by her, I am confident to say-she is my hero-writer. She creates a style of storytelling that moves directly into me like something entering my bloodstream. How often does something like that happen? I find lovely reads all up and down the spectrum which I relate to and linger over and applaud-but, just ever so seldom do I fall completely in love. I jump from one story into the next and I am never disappointed.

I am glad she found her way to Paris and fiction writing. She writes unapologetically about the world and the mundane intricacies of everyday life with wit and great care for her characters-whether they are likable or not. Her perspective is everyday and wholly unique.

Bravo, Ms. Gallant.

Lesley Young says

Just thinking about this book makes me want to read it again.

Amanda says

Mavis Gallant's short stories remind me of snowglobes: technically perfect, but nearly impossible to get inside of. I admire their gloss and the careful scenes they depict, but I also want to see the workings. This rule of thumb applies to the first two groups of stories in this collection, At Home and Canadians Abroad. However, the last section, Linnet Muir, allows more room for exploration for the curious reader. These stories are the closest to autobiography that Gallant wrote, and perhaps it's this connection to her own life

that brings down her veil of detachment. Read the whole book for its attention to craft, but focus on the Linnet Muir stories if you find the emotional content of the first stories lacking.

Tina Siegel says

I know, I know. It's MAVIS GALLANT, therefore it's brilliant. And it might have been. I just couldn't get into it. The characters were unrelatable, the plots either convoluted or boring, the language mediocre. I didn't like it, and it pains me to admit that. I've read other of Gallant's work, and enjoyed it (well, I enjoyed it enough). But this one? I dreaded picking it up, and couldn't wait to put it down. Nothing but relief when I finished. Not for me.

kp says

Wise, funny, incisive, and sentence for sentence, one of the best stylists around.
