

Mavis Gallant



Photo by Alison Harris, [Canadian Books and Authors](#)

Listening to the interview on CBC, I sat on in the car. I had tuned in partway through the program, and was trying to guess who she was. The writer discussed her work and her relationships with publishers, in particular *The New Yorker*, where she has published over a hundred stories.

I had a hunch that I was listening to [Mavis Gallant](#). When she began to talk about her life in Paris, I was sure, and smiled to myself, recalling a character in one of her stories saying to his guests, "My wife is a North American," as if that explained everything.

Gallant has led an unusual life. As a child in Montreal, she went to 17 different schools, a mixture of public, boarding and convent schools, then studied in the U.S. She began her writing career in Canada, publishing for *Preview* beginning at age 22. Her work also appeared in *Standard Magazine* and *Northern Review*.

At age 28, determined to write fiction full-time, she moved to Paris. There, she produced a steady output of short stories and novellas, including *The Other Paris* (1956), *My Heart is Broken* (1964), *The Pegnitz Junction* (1973) and *Stories from the Fifteenth District* (1979). Two novels, *Green Water, Green Sky* (1959) and *A Fairly Good Time* (1970), appeared during the same period.

In 1981, Mavis Gallant won the Governor General's Award for *Home Truths: Selected Canadian Stories*. In 1983-4 she returned to Canada to serve as Writer-in-Residence at the University of Toronto. She was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1981, a Companion in 1993 and received the Canada-Australia Literary Prize in 1984. She was awarded the Matt Cohen Prize and the Blue Metropolis International Grand Prix.

Gallant is also a respected essayist, who has written extensively on French culture and society, as well as penning eye-witness observations on the student riots of 1968. Her

essays have been collected in *Paris Notebooks: Essays and Reviews* (1986). Her *Selected Stories* (1996) was also very well received.

Age 86 in 2009, she gave an interview to Paula Todd for [the Globe and Mail](#). For the interview, the author chose the Village Voice Bookshop in *St-Germain-des-Pres*, ascending the spiral staircase in spite of the osteoporosis that has bent her frame. Telling the interviewer that she came to Paris to see if she could make her living as a fiction writer, she said she didn't expect to be so successful.

As for biographers, Gallant says they'll have to wait till she's dead. They probe into the private life, rather than seeing the part where the writing comes from, another part of your brain, your system.