

the beginning of an attempt to supply the deficiency, covering (notwithstanding the comprehensive title) writers in a relatively small number of languages: Portuguese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish. Resulting from a 1978 MLA project, this biography is altogether laudable in its aims, but in actuality is even more limited than the list of languages suggests. For it is selective, omitting not merely whole countries, but also, and it seems arbitrarily, certain writers from the countries which are included. Granted the monumental nature of the task as first planned, the reason for these omissions given by the editors—the need “to rely on the interest and availability of scholars in the fields represented in the original MLA project”—still seems anomalous in a scholarly work. In addition, since the bibliography also omits all anthologies, several well-known writers whose work appears in English only in such collections have been left out.

The annotations are useful, especially those which provide information on the quality and nature of the translations themselves, but they do not make up for the other lacks. As an introduction to women writers in the languages and countries represented, this bibliography has an obvious value, but it should not in any way be regarded as definitive.

Margaret Harry
Saint Mary's University

What Is To Be Done? Mavis Gallant. *Dunvegan, Ontario: Quadrant Editions, 1983. Pp.110.*

Mavis Gallant's first play depicts a milieu familiar to readers of her short stories—the world of a young woman maturing in war-time Montreal. Gallant's memories of Montreal in the 1940's honed to sharp clarity by 40 years separation from her native land, enable her to recreate compelling historical pictures of the era that fascinate the reader, pictures made more

vivid by her assurity in producing the exact word or turn of phrase to set the situation, by her acuity of observation, and by her sophisticated wit. Her fine ear for Canadian dialogue, her observations on Canadian society and her attunement to the Canadian sense of humour place Gallant firmly among the finest English Canadian writers. *What Is To Be Done* is a continual delight to its reader.

In ten scenes *What Is To Be Done* delineates the experiences of two Canadian women between August 1942 and 8 May 1945: Jenny, at eighteen, still romantic and idealistic, and Molly disillusioned at twenty, with an unwanted child and a husband overseas. The girls are receiving Stalinist instruction as the play begins from an ex-Glaswegian Marxist against the staccato counterpoint of radio bursts. Jenny's only weapon against boredom and frustration is a series of evening courses—"I took Russian last winter... thirty-seven hours. We learned poetry. Well, one poem." Now she takes Strategic Journalism on three nights and Botany, Ethnology, Popular Superstitions, Moths and Butterflies of the British Isles, Book Binding and Illumination to fill the rest of the week. She signs up for the courses because "There's nothing else to do at night." On the advice of her Strategic Journalism course instructor, Jenny phones possible items to her paper's editor throughout the play because she wants to get out of the Department of Appraisements and Averages and to be a real journalist. Naively she has fixed her eyes to the top and believes that after the war she will reach her pinnacle. "After victory we'll have whatever we require in the most simple and natural way. "Street-smart and cynical, Molly knows that victory will bring boredom and frustration home to her. In his letters her husband reminds her she is only holding his job until his return. "My money." She complains, "He wants to know how I'm spending my money. Money I make."

At the end both girls know "Tomorrow we will have to change everything. The words we say.

The things we mean. The things we want.” Together Molly and Jenny represent the future of the young women left in Montreal at the end of the war. Jenny will never be a reporter, will never reach the Editorial Department. She will remain a clerk forever preparing graphs of the average age of cabinet ministers after 1923 in the Department of Appraisements and Averages, until she marries. Molly will convert her sophistication from self-support to the role of supportive help-mate for a returned war-veteran. Nothing is to be done. The future for the Jennys and Mollys of Montreal in the 1940’s was menial clerical tasks or marriage and motherhood. Gallant does not deny the quasi-autobiographical quality to much of her Montreal writing. For her *What Is To Be Done?* was to get far away and stay away.

In ten vignettes of brilliantly witty dialogue, enhanced especially in Scene VII by the author’s own comments, Gallant provides a series of scathing observations on the waste and misuse of female society, interspersed with compassionate images of the joys and sorrows of growing-up in a world turned inside out. Perfect writing, however, does not guarantee good theatre. Conflict and its resolution are the stuff of drama and must be realized on stage to produce effective theatre. In *What Is To Be Done?* the conflict is with the vast and vague off-stage forces of international facism, or with the narrow minded editor, never seen or heard, or with an overseas husband whose letters never arrive in sequence. What should have been done when Tarragon Theatre took on the play was rework Gallant’s brilliant material into a playable script.

In interviews Gallant has revealed that she sent the script to John Hirsch who had been asking her to write a play since 1968; then Hirsch forwarded the script without specific comment to Bill Glassco at Tarragon Theatre where it was lost in a pile of new scripts submitted to the Theatre. When Urjo Kareda assumed the artistic director’s role at Tarragon, he wrote to Gallant

asking to read the script and decided immediately to add it to his opening season. The world premiere was presented in Toronto on 11 November, 1982. She was surprised, she noted, that at no time were there any major demands for rewriting. And it is a re-write which *What Is To Be Done?* requires before it becomes a usable, viable script. Tarragon was fortunate to have the services of two brilliant actresses for Molly and Jenny who created their own interpretations of the characters, but a good play must be able to stand on its own and survive with a serviceable, if less than brilliant cast.

The theme of the play, the role of women in a world war-emptied of men, is one which has already been treated on the Continent and in England. No doubt Gallant was familiar with *L’Atelier* by Jean-Claude Grumberg voted the best play of 1979 by the French drama critics and with *Touched* by Stephen Lowe. *What Is To Be Done?* pales when compared to these two works. The series of disjointed vignettes used by Grumberg and Lowe and by Caryl Churchill in such plays as *Top Girls*, achieve dramatic unity through on-stage conflict and resolution. Gallant has accepted their methods and themes and presented them to Canadian theatre. Such a gift from one of her stature can only have a beneficial and productive effect in the long run, but in the immediate situation, her gift is better handed to the reading, than the theatre-going public. As a child must have two parents, likewise a play. *What Is To Be Done?* provides ready evidence of its literary inheritance from playwrights such as Grumberg, Lowe and Churchill, but no theatrical progenitor is evident, and its prognosis for survival on stage is not good.

Patrick O’Neill
Mount Saint Vincent University