



Mavis Gallant

dead — there wasn't an ant, there wasn't a fly, there wasn't a mouse in the street. The war wasn't theirs, and it wasn't theirs then, and it wasn't theirs when it was over. *Inglese* culture.

LL: Was it frightening downtown?

MG: It was amazing. And then I called from a drug-store or something, and they said, "Well, the war isn't over. [laughter] We've had a contra-indication." They had ready an extra issue — "War Ends" — and they said it would be tomorrow or the next day. So peace began with a hangover.

LL: By 1955 when you returned to Montreal, it had all changed.

MG: Everything seemed to me to be gone, yes.

LL: How did you notice the change?

MG: Physically it wasn't the same, and that bothered me. The trees were coming down, the city wasn't as attractive, and I remember writing in my journal, "This is a cemetery. I'm in a cemetery."

Things were different. I remember somebody saying to me, "But you don't realize — you left." There was a big housing crisis, everything was at sixes and sevens for a while until things got straightened out. When I went back everyone seemed to be on the rails, with pensions... in sight (laughter). I was living like a bird on a branch, from twig to twig. People were much more settled, and God knows I don't blame them — if everybody lived like me, the world would come to an end.

LL: You stayed in Montreal a long time in 1955, didn't you?

MG: I think I stayed there quite a while, and then I went to New York.

LL: Were you aware of changes on a political level

— of anything that would anticipate what would happen after Duplessis' death in 1959?

MG: No. I remember somebody came over when Drapeau was first elected, and said, "we've got this new mayor, and he's absolutely marvelous, and he's got rid of the Mafia. All the guys with the big cigars are gone. The city's been cleaned up." I believed him. And (laughter) of course when I was in Montreal it was exactly the same. The guys with big cigars were still running things.

LL: The reason I ask that is because "Bernadette," which arose out of your stay in Montreal in '55, seems to anticipate dramatic change in Quebec.

MG: Well, of course, fiction is a different thing. Fiction has its own dynamic. It almost seems to grow out of itself. I can't comment on that.

I was greatly criticized by a woman who taught at Laval. She got very worked up about that story because she felt that I was writing about French-Canadians as a servant class. She said, "Why didn't you make her Ukrainian?" I said, "Because I never saw a Ukrainian maid in Montreal in my life — in the time I'm writing about — never." There were Ukrainians in other parts of Canada — but a Ukrainian maid in Montreal, in the forties and fifties? Really and truly!

Linda Leith, the new editor of Matrix magazine, is writing a book on English fiction in Quebec since 1945.

Linda Leith wishes gratefully to acknowledge the generous assistance of the FCAR in Quebec in supporting her work on the English writers of Quebec.

we'd talk about this new Jerusalem, this great world that was going to arise, and we were all going to go to Czechoslovakia, for some reason, because we thought that real democracy was going to be there, and I had great faith in Masaryk. We were all very naive.

I think of how Simone de Beauvoir says "J'étais flouée" — I don't have the bitterness that she has, because I'm not bitter about my life — but I do sometimes think, if I could be 20 and sitting on a step and thinking about what's going to come with such radiance, optimism...and how quickly it sank, it was like a soufflé. Almost from V-E day, it was over. People were scared to death for their jobs. People were terrified.

LL: Why was the end of the war a terrifying event?

MG: Because any major change is. And I think people were unconsciously terrified of unemployment. The unemployment of the thirties was still very much on their minds. People rioted in the streets. I was living downtown in Montreal. People went up and down Ste. Catherine Street and knocked over street-cars. They just didn't know what to do.

It broke out on the 7th, because we had a false alarm. It was a mistake, and people all over the world celebrated. I even had a friend who was in a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia, and they celebrated, and then the S.S. guards came back — it wasn't over. It was over the next day.

I called my newspaper and asked what I should do — it must have been a Sunday or a Monday because I was at home — and I was told to "go out and get impressions." They were getting out a special issue, and the impressions were just of people swarming around, first nervously, then drunker and drunker. We walked all the way down to the east end, and the east end was

Walking the Gatineau, walking the planet

Malcolm Reid

The man in the baseball cap let a long silence go by.

"I just wanted to listen to us walking," he finally said. "I just wanted to hear our steps again, crunching on the gravel."

He was one of the twenty people seated in a circle in a church basement in Hull, preparing for their walk into Ottawa the following morning. He spoke in French, a slow sort of French that went well with his straw-brown beard.

Each person, in turn, gave a little statement on why she was walking in this march.

"This is my work," said an American woman with white hair. She was crisp, sitting in a studied upright-ness. "I'm a fulltime worker for peace and social justice. That's all. I'm walking because we have to do something to change things."

Another woman, younger, long wispy hair, a furrow between her eyebrows:

"Well, I got involved in this at the University of Montreal. We were studying the Theology of Liberation. It was very good, it was theoretical — and it seemed to me this march might be a way of making it practical. So now, tomorrow, I have to decide if I'm

going to sit down at the Defence Department. And I've got the shakes..."

A lean, olive-skinned young man was curled, almost draped, on a battered couch, his sleeping bag rolled up beside him.

"Every prison-camp guard has said, 'I'm not responsible.' We've all said, 'I'm not responsible. That's why I'm walking.'"

The circle was being filled in, there was something ceremonial about it. Something Indian. In my twenty years around the peace movement I've often found peace people good at this kind of setting of an atmosphere. Marxists are better at evaluating the real chances of an action, NDPers and Péquistes are better at following up their actions with phone and doorbell work. But the peace people have the council-fire in them; the flame of the created moment.

My turn came.

"I'm doing this," I said, knowing I had very small claims in the discussion, arriving this late in the event, "because of three rivers."

The poster that provoked the adventure began appearing on the posts of our neighbourhood in Que-

bec toward the end of summer, 1987.

(The telephone and hydro poles are one of the basic media of communication in Saint-Jean-Baptiste. They always announce at least a dozen events that you probably wouldn't have heard about otherwise... And they're an art scene, too. Some of the finest graphic work in Quebec, both high-quality colour work on slick paper, and quick counterculture xeroxes, is on view on the poles at any given time.)

This poster was fairly simple black-and-white work with a sketch of three women walking along with placards in their hands. "The Long March against War and Misery," it said.

The event was a walk from Quebec City to Ottawa, laid out over a period of a few weeks in the fine autumn air. Red on the hills.

The walkers would talk to people along the way, and though each would bring his own concerns, her own passions, to the stroll for peace, to the hike for humanity, a focus of it all would be the *White Paper on Defence*.

One of the marchers, a sardonic young guy from Montreal, had bought a copy of the *White Paper* from the government store for the sole purpose of filling in the pale-blue skies in which submarines flew, and against which missiles and fighter planes silhouetted, with his diary of the march. And with the comments and poems of people he met as he walked, and asked to write in his book.

I was born and brought up in Ottawa, ten minutes' walk from a beach on the Ottawa River; and I've lived the recent years of my life in Quebec City, in Saint-Jean-Baptiste district, just back of the Plains of Abraham.

So I've made the trip from Quebec to Ottawa, upstream along the Saint Lawrence, along the Ottawa, hundreds of times. Perhaps a thousand.

These two valleys are my region, you could say. The habitat of the animal that I am, the part of the planet that is familiar to me, that is written into my codes.

And yet I've always made the trip by bus! By car! By train! I don't really know these valleys as part of nature; or rather, I know a few, only a few, of the millions of things there might be to know about them.

As soon as I saw the poster, I realized it was asking me to do something I'd always wanted to do, at least since I was fourteen years old. To walk, step by step, my land. To truly qualify as an animal of the Ottawa region.

But of course I was busy.

Of course I put off making definite plans.

I chatted enviously about the coming march with my friend Monique, a native of the Saint Lawrence Valley over toward the Appalachians, who has made her whole life in the past six years into a walking of the Americas in the cause of —

Peace and socialism?

Peace and feminism?

Peace and ecology?

Peace and plenty, let's say; that controversial proposition in 1988. Peace and the things that would enable peace to move in and take up habitat on earth: a better sharing of the earth's resources among its peoples and within its peoples; and a wiser using of oil, metal, air, water...

(These things, of course, are not "things." They are an idea, a utopia, an undefined spirit which



Engraving by Malcolm Reid

Marxists, Moslems and punks all participate in, along with other humans. They are what Bob Marley and the Wailers were wailing for, what the Shouting Signpainters were shouting about, what Isiah prophesied and Almighty Voice voiced. What your next-door neighbour believes in when he's feeling his most neighbourly. Don't you love thy neighbour when he's in that mood?)

In Ottawa, I was brought up to call this spirit by the name *socialism*. So on my walk, I'd think of myself as walking for socialism, walking to the city where I first heard the word "socialism."

Then it was the last weekend of the march!

If I rushed, if I got on board an All-Stop expedition with Gilles and Nathalie of the Amies de la Terre, I could just make it to Gatineau for the evening of the tenth. I could walk the last few miles into Ottawa with the people on the *Longue Marche contre la Guerre et la Misère*. Red on the hills, red on the soil and surge of the Gatineau Hills.

I could help place a wreath on the war memorial reading "To Truly Remember is to Stop all Practices of War." Oh, how dull and sad and at the same time guilt-inspiring those November the Eleventh ceremonies had always seemed on television in the fifties. How pretentious the angel's bronze wings had seemed, how predatory and official.

The civil servant who, through All-Stop, had pro-

vided us with our lift, let us off in Ottawa, not in Gatineau. So we'd arrived too soon. We would have to find our way back to the town of Gatineau, we'd have to slow down to the right pace.

For Gilles and Nathalie this backtracking contained no emotional resonance. They came from elsewhere and had already dipped into this march at several points along its route. They were full of practical movement concerns: Was the march getting enough press? Who'd been at that meeting in Montreal with Vallières and Berrigan? How was morale?

We crossed to Hull and found ourselves in a maze of concrete that was entirely new since my childhood. It is filled and emptied every day, with thousands of workers in government services. We got out of the maze and onto a suburban bus, we headed east to Gatineau (also known, when I was young, as Pointe Gatineau, or Gatineau Mills).

We got off the bus a little early, and entered the town on foot. It was, for Gilles and Nathalie, a strip of gas stations and hot dog restaurants and bathroom-tiling stores exactly like every other Quebec locality they had ever been in.

But I was an animal of the region.

I was getting excited.

Hey, weren't those the smokestacks of Canadian International Paper? Weren't those the piles of logs? No smell today; but the whole working-class energy

of the place was the off it young men in of downtown Ottawa ever to elect a black

And there —

There was the sided block with a one containing an airman, one containing no known of the next volunteers) — a se

Transport truck

Gilles and Nathalie

let's at least look at the marchers, but...

Then, in the m began to be mostly down over rocks, crashing them. Crash down past a town quietly into a wide with the Ottawa R.

The very point sense of myself — sugared off in "the tives "up in the Gat sense of myself; the a disappeared Ind border of Southern

Later we joined them in the church I walked with Gilles erty streets where I'd always passed

The people in t conscious of being of people by now, world, softened to March." And they and abstract reason the conclusion of

The had, they hind. They were They were Isiah, Goldman. What d were on?

It has occurred the most charac

The space shutt the more reason fo

When the do k no-longer-imperial dor, and all the Quebec, in Canada

It seems to me clarifying and exte sentence, *The med*

The medium, l buses and comput reservations; and money; and the money (representing above all planes, th through the sky.

That's the meo

And the messa

of the place was there, the shudder of a town shaking off its young men into the taverns and juvenile courts of downtown Ottawa. And also being the first town ever to elect a black man to the Quebec legislature.

And there —

There was the war memorial of Gatineau. A four-sided block with a soldier on one side, a sailor on another, an airman on a third. And on the fourth, the one containing no dates (for the dates aren't yet known of the next war that will call on Gatineau for volunteers) — a servicewoman.

Transport trucks whizzed past.

Gilles and Nathalie were bored. Come on, I said, let's at least look at this town! Maybe we've missed the marchers, but...

Then, in the middle of town where the houses began to be mostly of wood, there came, crashing down over rocks, the Gatineau River. A little river, crashing down from the hills with the red slashed across them. Crashing down under a bridge, crashing down past a town lookout platform, and then going quietly into a widening, into a mixing, into a fusion, with the Ottawa River.

The very point at which my earliest Québécois sense of myself — a kid who went to "the Gatineau," sugared off in "the Gatineau," had friends with relatives "up in the Gatineau" — fused with my Canadian sense of myself; the slow, plain, wide river, named for a disappeared Indian tribe, that formed the upper border of Southern Ontario.

Later we joined up with the marchers, we found them in the church basement. The sun came down and I walked with Gilles and Nathalie in these mild-poverty streets where I'd never been on foot before, which I'd always passed through by car.

The people in this church basement were scarcely conscious of being in Hull. They were a special tribe of people by now, they were toughened towards the world, softened towards each other, they were "the March." And they were entirely caught up in the vast and abstract reasons which were driving them on to the conclusion of their adventure.

The had, they felt, left their regional selves behind. They were philosophers now, and pilgrims. They were Isiah, and Almighty Voice, and Emma Goldman. What did it matter what riverbank they were on?

It has occurred to me that drastic travels are one of the most characteristic actions of the 1980s.

The space shuttle explodes and kills its crew; all the more reason for us to dash frenetically about the one planet we do know how to travel.

When the Tamils of Sri Lanka, the Turks of poor, no-longer-imperial Turkey, the illegals of El Salvador, and all the other drastic-travellers, arrive in Quebec, in Canada...

It seems to me that these human beings are both clarifying and extending the meaning of the famous sentence, *The medium is the message*.

The medium, here, is the world system of ships, buses and computer circuits to certify tickets and reservations; bribery, also, of course, and prostitution and money, and the electronic signals that represent money (representing, thus, a representation) — and above all planes, those pieces of savage bauxite flying through the sky.

That's the medium, all that.

And the message, transmitted along this medium,

is the people themselves. Their lives, their torn lives, their crazy hope of suddenly being in another hemisphere, another economy, another ideology, where things will be okay at last.

Where all will be forgiven, all will be clean, all will be possible. So magnificently possible that every penny and indignity you scrape together is worth it. This jolt is worth it, this trip, this hurtling of oneself along a wire of world communications like an electron of injustice dearly wishing to ground itself in the cool, well-organized soil of North America.

These people are a message from the Third World to us, to the First World. They have communicated themselves to us on a system we created and put in place. We put it in place primarily in the desire to communicate *our* messages to *them*. But first they created the tradition of the immigrant who flies many times back to his left-behind homeland for visits; then they devised, in the 1960s, this still more punctual use of the system. Even the apparently easy-to-get Canadian passport seems to be part of the system; all the easygoing aspects of our not-always-easygoing country.

They place before us, underdevelopment, hunger, shattered cultures and food chains. This is when they are *not* true refugees, but economic exiles. And they place dictatorship, torture, disappearance squads, before us, when they *are* true refugees, true political. They are the *parecidos*, the *ones who appear*.

Much has been written about the reduction of life, vitality, sensuality, to mere imagery on screens in the video age. Here we are in the presence of the opposite phenomenon. An actual society becomes a screen on which unexpected human figures from another society appear suddenly through the relatively instantaneous manipulation of engines, motors, steering wheels.

The message has been picked up very clearly in my part of the society. Quebec, in a rather peevish and xenophobic mood, nevertheless became very attached to the Turks Canada expelled this spring; media coverage created sympathy for this Islamic and little-known group, and people were out to picket their departure. Was there a compensation here, for say, the shooting of a black youth by the Montreal police? Was there something Christian; or something internationalist left over from more revolutionary times in recent Quebec history? An indirect response to Palestine, Chile, Afghanistan, Iran? Or is it simply the *faces*?

Hard to say.

The message, the flesh-and-blood data on the jet circuits and the battered steamers, it seems to me, both terrify and thrill us. We are invaded. But we cannot help but grasp that this is another part of the Long March against War and Misery.

Nathalie, during the march, had invented and sung a song:

*C'est la longue marche
Con-tre la guerre
Et LAAAAAAA misère...*

It was sung to the tune of *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, which if I recall was a song of the American Civil War.

Why not?

But I had my own song going through my head during this time. Mine was an old Quebec tune. It was called *Les Draveurs de la Gatineau*.

Malcolm Reid is a free-lance journalist living in Quebec City. This is the second in a series of regular columns in Border/Lines.

Surviving Thatcher

Ioan Davies

As Canadians debate what will happen to the cultural industries after Free Trade, the British are not so much concerned with the takeover of their industries by foreigners as they are with the enemy within the gates. Thatcher's government has culture all over its agenda, but most of its concerns are actively hostile to the idea that the arts and the media should be critical, independent, innovative and socially conscious. It abolished the Greater London Council largely because the GLC's cultural policies were politically assertive in favour of working class, black, gay, feminist, left activities (see Franco Bianchini's article in *New Formations*, No. 1, 1987). It has established a committee under the chairmanship of a very conservative ex-editor of the *Times* to monitor sex and violence on TV and Radio (apparently Arthur Conan Doyle and the A-Team are on the hit list). It has decided to "open up the air-waves" so the BBC may become a pay-tv network, while Rupert Murdoch will have no less than four regular channels (based mainly on American imports). In its notorious "Spycatcher" trials and their many repercussions it is

attempting to muzzle the press. (In the past year, Index on Censorship has found the Thatcher government more censorious than the USSR). In its policy towards the arts it chooses to reduce funding in spite of a major report published by the Policy Studies Institute on the economic importance of the arts in Britain which shows that in 1985/6 the arts (in terms of spending on supply and services) were as important a part of the economy as automobiles. And in education, not only has it decided to "privitize" a large segment of the schools, but it has so savaged the grants to universities that some of them have established sub-faculties (called "credit-banks") where departments have to demonstrate their marketability in order to survive.

The picture is not a happy one and anyone who returns to Britain is quickly made conscious of the overwhelming greed of the moneyed classes, their eyes bulging with avarice as they grab anything that is marketable and turn it into plastic gold, and talk, quite freely, of the riff-raff who populate the rest of the country. (The most brazen quote that I found was