



Across the Bridge: Stories

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

Mavis Gallant's stories take some getting used to, for instead of moving toward some meaningful sense of inevitability, as short stories often do, they create the novelistic expectation that—if the author chose—they could go on and on. Although Gallant has been compared to the great short-story writer, Anton Chekhov, she is really more akin to the master of the social novel, Jane Austen.

Like Austen, Gallant creates an ironic comedy of manners about characters living ordinary lives within a small polite society; the result is quietly effective, but perhaps too leisurely and detailed for the relatively small span of the short story. In one of the first four stories in ACROSS THE BRIDGE—which are novelistically interconnected in their focus on a genteel Montreal widow and her two daughters—the classic comedy of manners style is most obvious in a scene when a suitor for one of the daughters chokes on a chocolate. Gallant says “He was in trouble with a caramel,” and the family politely looks away so that he can “strangle unobserved.”

The title story, which focuses on another genteel courtship, ends in the typical drawing-room comedy style with a dinner engagement in which the young female protagonist cannot eat the flan because the restaurant has mistaken it for a piece of quiche and put parsley on it. As her suitor scraps off the parsley and begins to eat the dessert for her, the young woman says to herself that he must love her or otherwise the dessert would be disgusting.

Sly, subtle irony is Gallant's literary forte. Quiet, understated control governs both the lives of her characters and the style of her writing. More sauce than sustenance, her work is to be slowly savored, not eagerly gulped.

Sources for Further Study

Library Journal. CXVIII, September 1, 1993, p.225.

Maclean's. CVI, October 18, 1993, p.66.

The New York Times Book Review. XCVIII, September 12, 1993, p.7.

Publishers Weekly. CCXL, July 12, 1993, p.68.

The Washington Post Book World. XXIII, December 19, 1993, p.6.

Copyright Notice

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

Across the Bridge: Stories: Across the Bridge: Stories

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:
<http://www.enotes.com/across-bridge-stories-salem>