ShortCuts: Listening to Footnotes

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In creating a podcast-as-audio-edition for Ep.6 Mavis Gallant reads "Grippes and Poche" at SFU *– with a follow-up* Ep. 9 Mavis Gallant, Part 2: The 'Paratexts' of "Grippes and Poche" at SFU *– producers Kate Moffatt, Kandice Sharren, and Michelle Levy grapple with Gallant's asides, which they describe as an audio equivalent of the footnote. In this ShortCuts blog post, they have selected an audio clip from Gallant's reading where she spontaneously provides contextual information during her reading, followed by their reflections upon how the experience of a 'footnote' can differ in print and audio formats.*

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"'He showed none of the signs of prosperity Public Treasury seemed to like, such as membership in a golf club.' This is not a joke — on French income tax form you're asked if you belong to a golf club. [Gallant laughter] It puts you in another bracket. [audience laughter]" [16:08]

On February 14, 1984, Mavis Gallant read her short story "Grippes and Poche" at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia. Although "Grippes and Poche" was originally published in the *New Yorker* in November of 1982, Gallant mentions partway through the event that the papers she's reading from are proofs, a moment we draw attention to in our episode for *The SpokenWeb Podcast,* "Mavis Gallant Reads 'Grippes and Poche' at SFU in 1984." It is, however, only one of many asides Gallant offers her live audience of listeners—and this clip is another.

Throughout her reading, Gallant deviates from the published version of her work to provide contextual information or translations; in this particular clip, she explains a detail of French bureaucracy to her Canadian audience. The information Gallant provides is reminiscent of the kind of additional context a reader might find in a footnote: brief explanations, translations, clarifications of references, and citations or additional sources. However, footnotes are typically tucked at the bottom of a printed page, in a font smaller than that of the main text, and readers can ignore or read them as they please. Readers approach footnotes in vastly different — and often inconsistent — ways. Kate reads any footnotes shorter than a paragraph as she goes, and anything longer than a paragraph when she finishes the page; Kandice skims them when she remembers to; Michelle reads them if she wants to learn more about a point being made or find the references. And we only follow these procedures some of the time.

However, one had no choice but to listen to Gallant's asides during this reading, and during our listening of the recording. Gallant's interjections are additions to the story itself, voiced—and, in 2021, ghostly—clarifications woven into printed sentences. They exist only here, in the recorded reading, and not on the pages that hold her work in the *New Yorker*, or the various other books that collect this story. Their existence in the reading and not on the printed page is gestured to by Gallant's change in pitch, in tone as she interrupts herself. You can hear the short breath where she cuts herself off, the shift from her 'storytelling' voice to a confiding one as she shares information for a specific audience. The setting of the story in France puts a largely Canadian audience in an unfamiliar French—and more specifically, Parisian—landscape.

In this particular instance, the information Gallant provides about the intricacies of a foreign tax code allows the story's wry commentary to land. Her remark, "This is not a joke," further adds to the comedy, by making it clear that the actual joke is French tax law. Here, Gallant invites her listeners into the satire, or the "gentle send up," as she describes her story at the beginning of her reading. It is a joke about the absurdity of French tax law as well as the parsimony of her writer-hero, whom we could no more imagine playing golf than reporting his income from his very off-the-books apartments. It is just one occasion in the recording where listening to Gallant's performance deepens and enriches our understanding of the story, and allows us to experience the connection she created with her audience in 1984.

*

Selected audio is courtesy of the Simon Fraser University Archives and Records Management Department.

Listen to the full episodes of The SpokenWeb Podcast *based on this same recording, starting with the audio edition* Ep.6 Mavis Gallant reads "Grippes and Poche" at SFU *and followed by a series of interviews unpacking the behind-the-scenes of this reading and its recording,* Ep. 9 Mavis Gallant, Part 2: The 'Paratexts' of "Grippes and Poche" at SFU *.*

Explore annotations generated through AudiAnnotate *of Mavis Gallant reading the short story "Grippes and Poche" at Simon Fraser University in 1984, as played on Ep. 6 of* The SpokenWeb Podcast*.*

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Kate Moffatt is a recent graduate of the MA program in SFU's Department of English. Her research interests lie primarily with women's pedestrianism in the Romantic period and women's book history, and she brings a keen interest in the digital humanities, book and literary history, and archives and archival practices to her work as a Research Assistant for SpokenWeb.

Michelle Levy is Co-Director of the Digital Humanities Innovation Lab at Simon Fraser University. She brings a strong theoretical background in literary and sound studies to the SpokenWeb Project, and extensive expertise in data architecture and management that contributes to our creation of metadata standards necessary for the aggregation of diverse corpora of recorded literary readings.

Kandice Sharren is a recent graduate of the PhD program in SFU's Department of English. Her research focuses on print culture of the Romantic period, and she brings her experience with digital humanities, archival research, and book history to the SpokenWeb project.

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