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The Rewriting of a Masterpiece: *Hetty Dorval* and the Silencing of Good Reading

ROGER HYMAN

Reading, like writing, is a creative act. If readers only bring a narrow range of themselves to the book, then they'll only see their narrow range reflected in it.

— Ben Okri¹

SINCE ITS PUBLICATION IN 1947, there has been an academic consensus on Ethel Wilson's feminist masterpiece *Hetty Dorval*, a consensus to which Beverley Mitchell² took exception in her compelling 1976 article "In Defense of Hetty Dorval." The article, which appeared in the first issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature*, offered a formidable rebuttal to the accepted view of Hetty as an evil witch who bedevils the innocent Frankie Burnaby:

I realize my defense of Hetty contradicts the views of most critics, for she is generally seen as "evil" in contrast to Frankie's "innocence," as seductress and *femme fatale*, as "murky" as the Fraser river, as heartless, cruel, devoid of feeling — even as an "allegorical sense of political intrigue," a "psychopath" of "moral monstrosity," and a "freak of some kind, an anomaly of nature." I find little in the novel itself — and nothing in the rest of Ethel Wilson's fiction — to support these views. What I *do* find in the novel supports my opinion that Hetty is a much-maligned victim whose circumstances and significant comments go unremarked by a mature Frankie Burnaby, either because she is still too obtuse to understand them, or because her understanding overwhelms her — and what I find in the rest of Ethel Wilson's fiction confirms my opinion. In one sense, Hetty Dorval is the most completely "alone" of Ethel Wilson's characters, for society is not merely indifferent towards her, but actively hostile. (28)³

It seems beyond coincidence (though not beyond concern) that the first

issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature* accompanied Mitchell's reading of the novel with an article by Barrie Davies, one of the journal's founders, that supported "the views of most critics," therefore including those of Desmond Pacey, another of the journal's founders, who died before the first issue was published (and to whose memory it was dedicated). The article by Davies, with no direct mention of Mitchell, was a sharp rebuttal of her argument.⁴ "Lamia: The Allegorical Nature of *Hetty Dorval*" invokes Zeus's mistress, transformed into a child-devouring monster. The reading by Davies is diametrically opposed to the reading by Mitchell:

Hetty then is "poison" (p. 69), an "angel face" but a "selfish monster" (p. 72) and Frankie knows now what she is up against as she goes to encounter Hetty for the last time. . . . The path of Frankie is "frightening" and "unfamiliar" (p. 75) through a dark wasteland where she is "aghast at the pre-vision of craters, rubble and deaths" (p. 75). At the end of the journey is the battle with "the seven devils" (p. 75) of Hetty, her protean nature and her deadly beauty, but Frankie is armed with the "touchstone" of her own moral nature and knows "that Menace was still her true name" (p. 75). Frankie wins her battle over Hetty and even lies in the same bed as her. Hetty "docile as a child" (p. 88) now assumes the "S" shape of her Satanic and snake-like origins, but Frankie knows that to be "moved in pity of spirit" (p. 89) would be a foolish act of compassion. (Davies 139-40)⁵

The reading by Davies fell in line with almost thirty years of prior critical commentary. In addition to William New, P.M. Hinchcliffe, and Jeannette Urbas to whom she refers above, Mitchell also cites Desmond Pacey as holding views that the novel does not support, and her persuasive close reading of the text supports her contention that Hetty has been unjustly maligned and the novel poorly understood. Mitchell might also have mentioned the earliest academic comment, by Claude Bissell, who called it in 1948 a "slight first novel" with a "trite and melodramatic" plot that "grows out of the portrayal of the type of a beautiful, but amoral woman, whose callousness and insensitivity to human relations bring disaster to many who are dazzled by her superficial charms" (272). In an article in *Queen's Quarterly* in 1954, Pacey called Hetty "a convincingly spoiled and selfish minx" and went on to argue that "What gives piquancy and poignancy to the story of

Hetty Dorval is the fact that this evil woman is observed through the innocent eyes of an adolescent girl" ("Innocent Eye" 50, 51). Bissell and Pacey made two judgments that later critics adopted: Hetty is evil, and Frankie is a reliable narrator.

Mitchell repeated her claim about critical blindness in a paper presented at the 1982 Ethel Wilson Symposium and in her 1985 book *Ethel Wilson and Her Works*: "Since the feeling persists even today that *Hetty Dorval* is an apprentice work of a novice writer, it continues to be the most consistently misread and unappreciated of Wilson's works" (12). Her several readings should have influenced future critics, but with one or two exceptions that has not been the case.

My article should have been written in 1990 when Northrop Frye's unfortunate afterword was appended to the trade edition of *Hetty Dorval* or even earlier when it became clear that Mitchell's reading was being largely ignored. When I read of Mitchell's death, it seemed to be time to recognize the few critics who have at least partially questioned the "authorized" reading and to appreciate formally the intelligence of Mitchell's work. Doing so permits me to trace how the earliest questionable readings of the novel became deeply entrenched in the critical canon. I can also deal with some of the issues raised in the novel that have not been discussed, even by Mitchell, but are essential to a full understanding of it.

I agree with Mitchell that no Canadian novel has been more egregiously misread than *Hetty Dorval*. There is no more influential example of such misreading than Frye's afterword, the language of which suggests an atavistic fear of women as ritual emasculators:

[Hetty] has the charm of the self-absorbed narcissist who inspires admiration but is never touched by it, a fascination endearing in a baby or a housecat but frightening in an adult human. She is constantly spoken of as though her worst quality is her instinct to walk out of situations as soon as they involve her in responsibilities; but what makes her sinister is rather the way she walks into them. Wherever she is, some male in her orbit will move toward her, and the praying mantis will soon have another meal. (105-06)

The debate over the novel centres on whether one sees Frankie as an agent of social and moral justice defeating the forces of destructive female narcissism ("Having defeated Hetty Dorval, Frankie can take

her place, fully fledged, in the real world” [Moore 39]) or whether one sees Frankie as an instrument of social conformity, trained to defend the values of a heteronormative and narrowly judgmental society. With the exception of Mitchell and a small number of contemporary feminist critics, Frye and most of the critics who both preceded and followed him see the novel in terms of the former option. The academic consensus is that Frankie must take up arms against Hetty’s immorality (and she is seen to do so successfully) in order to rescue an ethical social order that Hetty threatens. In these readings, Hetty is seen as her father, Frank, sees her — an existential danger to be eradicated.

Nearly seventy years of such criticism have reduced one of the country’s most compelling novels of social engagement to a simplistic morality play, largely ignoring its critique of accepted gender, racial, class, and moral attitudes and effacing the compelling critical voice that probed its larger meaning. Even more seriously, a novel that challenges the victimizing and colonizing power of a social “narrative of certainty” has been subject to a critical narrative of certainty that denies the championing of uncertainty and ambivalence at its heart.⁶

In his 1967 book *Ethel Wilson*, Pacey agrees with Bissell’s earlier assessment, calling *Hetty Dorval* a “work of apprenticeship [that] cannot compare in depth of thought and complexity of technique with [her] later novels” (62). He also says that “The story, in its modest way, is being held up as a microcosm of the whole human world prior to the Great War. The irresponsible individualism of Hetty Dorval, multiplied a million times, precipitated that conflict” (56). Perhaps the novel is “a microcosm of the whole human world,” but it is not the Great War against which the novel must be read but the next one and the Holocaust at its centre.⁷ And it is not Hetty’s “irresponsible individualism” that suggests the destruction of war but the power of society to demonize and victimize those, like Hetty, who are seen as threateningly different.

Pacey establishes the “authorized” reading of Hetty that has persisted and, in doing so, misunderstands the difference between what Frankie sees and what the reader might understand differently: “Always in the background are vague rumours of some horrible secret in the life of Mrs. Dorval, and it is only near the very close of the novel . . . that we learn of her illegitimate birth and of her involvement in a series of unsavoury affairs with rich and powerful men” (*Ethel Wilson* 45). Surprisingly,

Pacey does not question the narrator's reliability; the phrase "that we learn" suggests that the "vague rumours" in the background have moved to the foreground and are to be taken as facts. Bissell's article set the tone for this view of narrative authenticity: "The story of Hetty Dorval is told by Frankie Burnaby, as she recalls a series of incidents that stretched over the later years of childhood, adolescence, and the first years of womanhood. The narrative preserves a central point of view appropriate to an intelligent and perceptive adult . . ." (272). Of this view, Mitchell says that "The evidence against [Hetty] has been presented by a narrator limited not only by youth and inexperience but also by her parents' attitudes which were based on gossip" ("Right Word" 82). And, as early as the third page of *Hetty Dorval*, the unreliability of Frankie as narrator is made clear when she mistakes Mrs. Broom for Mrs. Dorval. More revealing is the inclusion of the phrase "storm and fury" (84) at the end of the gossip-laden speech by Mrs. Kennerly-Corbett about the "series of unsavoury affairs" to which Pacey refers.

Bissell and Pacey were not alone in their acceptance as fact judgments that the narrator's unreliability renders questionable. New describes Hetty as "a power, an influence, even an allegorical sense of political intrigue" ("Genius" 70). He reads the novel as a classic *Bildungsroman* in which Frankie's moral development is central while Hetty is a static figure whose negative presence assists in that development. The novel, New tells us, "studies the nebulous influence which the experienced title character has on a young girl" ("Irony" 84). Paul Comeau sees Frankie as on a "crusade" which "depends upon her finally seeing Hetty Dorval as she really is" (26).

In these views, neither woman is seen to present any challenge to prevailing gender and power norms. Those challenges are perhaps missed because of an unusual tension in the novel between the form of the *Bildungsroman* and its content: Frankie's "growing up" reverses the traditional *Bildungsroman* in which maturation is connected to enlightenment. Frankie becomes not enlightened but darkened, learning to create victims of those who refuse to conform to the world her elders have constructed. By the 1970s, Canadian writers had forged a powerful literature of dissent, and postcolonial and feminist literature and academic studies had become forceful, so Wilson's use of Hetty as a foil to challenge conventional values should have been more readily recognized. There was no critical recognition that Hetty's self-absorption marks

the systemic ethical disruption that destroyed the life of the angry and vengeful depressive who raised her and denied her maternity.⁸ Hetty is certainly flawed, but only Mitchell seems to have asked why.

That recognition was not made; that question was not asked. In 1973, Hinchcliffe called Hetty a “psychopath” who displays “moral monstrosity” (65), a judgment that Stouck unhesitatingly accepted.⁹ And in 1974 Urbas wrote that “Hetty is a destructive force . . . breaking up marriages and marriages-in-the-making. . . . The dominant traits of her character lie not in the pursuit of sensual gratification but in her passivity and egoism” (7). In a 1977 article, Lois Gottlieb and Wendy Keitner repeated the traditional binaries, arguing that Hetty is “lascivious, selfish [and] destructive,” whereas Frankie has a “wholesome, affectionate temperament” (133).

In an essay entitled “A Cat Among the Falcons,” Wilson suggested that she was aware of the critical narrative that had defined her work: “I am a country cat among my friends the falcons who are handsome, formidable and trained birds, equipped to detect and pounce upon error” (19). And, to those who argue that Wilson celebrated only the holiness of life or, as Pacey put it, that her “tone is one of gentle wonderment at the vagaries of human nature” (*Ethel Wilson* 45), one offers her comment that she was among those “who indulge in non-conformity of opinion or who are early inclined towards scepticism” (18-19) and her respect for Henry Fielding’s “knowledge of life’s dark places” (“Cat” 15).

In “*Ethel Wilson’s Novels*,” Stouck, like Hinchcliffe and Urbas, falls in line with the assessments of Bissell, New, and Pacey: “The heroine of the title is a spoiled, attractive woman whose life illustrates the very reverse of Donne’s counsel: Hetty Dorval islands herself in a world of selfish comforts and amusements and leaves behind her a long string of broken commitments. Her story is narrated by Frankie Burnaby, a young school girl who is initially infatuated with Hetty, but who eventually comes to see her without romantic illusions” (74-75). In an article in *Studies in Canadian Literature* in 1981, Paul Comeau repeated the standard mantra: “Though initially captivated by Mrs. Dorval’s beauty and sophistication, Frankie soon discovers that Hetty’s loveliness is a deceptive screen for an inherent selfishness and immorality. . . . Within the novel’s symbolic structure, Hetty logically becomes associated with the equally enigmatic and destructive menace of war” (25).

There was an opportunity for some critical balance in 1982 at

the University of Ottawa's Ethel Wilson Symposium. Barbara Wild seemed to provide some balance: "There would be no story to tell at all if Frankie (and Ethel Wilson) did not in some measure love Hetty, and find in her a refreshing presence" (38). She also noted that calling Hetty a "menace" is an "insidious" labelling designed to win "Frankie to her parents' way of thinking" (37), and importantly she questioned the control exercised by the Burnabys over their daughter as "the constructing of 'cocoon'" (36). Wild asked as well one of the key and almost always ignored questions raised by the novel: "Should one screen out from one's life people who hold differing values from oneself?" (36). This question, as we shall see, touches on the novel's concern with the dismissal of any form of difference. There was a suggestion in Wild's paper, then, that Frankie is subject to a family dynamic based upon powerfully held prejudices about female independence and the use of parental authority and demonization to support those prejudices. But Wild did not deal with the broader social significance of these issues, nor did she mention Mitchell's powerful close reading of the novel. Her paper confirmed the established binaries even while questioning how they are imposed: "Hetty is not merely different; she is evil. It follows that Frankie's mother is the true angel of the situation, the voice of sanity, 'that sane little arbiter'" (37).

Beyond this, balance was not evident at the symposium. Donna Smyth reiterated the established view of Hetty and Frankie and reversed the moral tragedy at the end of the novel: "Hetty is revealed as a selfish bitch, Frankie's alter ego whom she has to confront and defeat. Dependent always on men, Hetty *trots off* to Vienna with her German lover just as the war is about to begin. Her denial of the mother-daughter bond symbolizes the betrayal of love and trust that is about to descend on the world" (90; emphasis added). Smyth quoted Pacey, Stouck, and Lorraine McMullen; she did not mention Mitchell.

New, who summed up the conference, asked "How, for that matter, are we to respond to Hetty Dorval, for Hetty Dorval, despite Beverly [sic] Mitchell's spirited defence, is a Problem" ("Critical Notes" 142). Frankie was not seen as a problem, nor were her parents or the community that trains her to resist difference. As a problem, Hetty was seen as being responsible for her victimization.

In *Ethel Wilson: A Critical Biography*, Stouck wholeheartedly supports the authorized reading: "Barrie Davies has argued most cogently

for the allegorical nature of this character by linking her with a series of beautiful but destructive seductresses from literature, including the sirens and Circe from classical mythology, La Belle Dame sans Merci, and especially Lamia, the serpent who took the form of a beautiful woman" (132). Stouck confirms his approval of Hinchcliffe's designation of Hetty as a "psychopath, whose moral monstrosity resides in her ability to forget anyone or any event that would burden her with responsibility," by continuing to refer to her as a "psychopath," as if the matter were settled (132-33); he concludes his study with the comment that the story is about a "psychopath's powerful impact on an impressionable girl" (134). Stouck also approves of Urbas's characterization of Hetty as "a freak of some kind, an anomaly of nature" (132). His only reference to Mitchell is in an endnote that reminds us that she is "the only exception" to the almost unanimous view that Hetty is "a negative presence in something like an allegory of good and evil" (131).

Glenn Willmott, like many of the earlier critics, sees Frankie as a character on the road from adolescence to maturity, a character in a *Bildungsroman*: "Frankie emerges as a figure of the bildung of compromise — independent, but responsible for the society in which she lives" (137). Kristine Abramoff accepts the view of Hetty as a sexual manipulator of men who "does not accept money directly for her sexual favours, but instead attracts men strategically. She marries rich men who are about to die, or breaks up marriages to acquire rich keepers in order to get the wealth or power that she wants. . . . She lives off the men she preys upon" (3).

Since the 1980s, a small number of female critics have questioned some of these views.¹⁰ Verena Klein, like Mitchell, has argued that *Hetty Dorval* has been "most frequently misinterpreted by critics" and that the negative influence in the text is not Hetty but Mrs. Burnaby, who, afraid of losing control over her daughter's life, undermines her confidence in her own judgement by portraying the attractive Hetty as a deceiving, monstrous woman (88).¹¹ This view owes much to the Gottlieb and Keitner article referred to earlier about mother-daughter relationships but does not refer to the binaries upheld by that article. Faye Hammill's article on "sophistication" in Wilson's work summarizes the critical controversy over the novel and credits Mitchell for "meticulously demonstrat[ing] that there is no textual evidence for Hetty's depravity, that everything said against her is based on hearsay,

and that the truth of her past is never revealed” (59). Hammill also makes clear that Stouck’s position is at odds with Mitchell’s: “David Stouck, in his authoritative 2003 biography of Wilson, writes more moderately of Hetty, but still presents her as dangerous, describing the ‘forbidden, romantic picture of sophistication and freedom’ which she represents for the young Frankie, who makes a ‘transition from innocence to experience under the sullyng influence of Hetty’” (59). And Hammill disagrees with Pacey’s binary of “Hetty as ‘evil’ and Frankie as embodying . . . innocence” (61-62). Christa Zeller Thomas looks at the novel through a Freudian lens, cites Mitchell approvingly, and argues that Hetty’s character is the focus of instability. Of these critics, only Hammill notes that Frankie is moulded to accept her parents’ views, but, like Wild, she pays no attention to the relationship between that moulding and the broader conservative, patriarchal, and colonizing views that the novel intensely troubles. None mentions the central role that Frankie’s training plays in issues of gender inequity, female victimization, and Indigenous colonization or the role of “othering” in portraying war and the Holocaust. Nor does any refer to the powerful influence of Frye’s unfortunate reading of the novel.¹²

So the enduring critical assessment is that Hetty is a child-devouring monster, a male-devouring praying mantis, a cannibal who eats Richard and Molly, a “self-absorbed narcissist,” a rampant individualist whose example caused the war, a sexual predator who strategically lives off the men on whom she preys, a psychopathic monster who possesses a protean nature and a deadly beauty, and the person whose evil behaviour is responsible for Frankie’s moral development. Given Wilson’s clues to her intentions, these readings are unsupportable. There is a powerful irony in Frankie’s name — she is both “frank” as in “honest” while she is anything but honest as “Frankie,” or little Frank, who, in becoming her father’s acolyte and replacement, learns that those who are different are threats who must be destroyed. Far more suggestive is Hetty’s name, a short form that asks us to recall, as Mitchell noted, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne and the implications for her of her time’s middle-class certainties. The central character in George Eliot’s *Adam Bede*, Hetty Sorrell, “seems made to turn the heads not only of men, but of all intelligent mammals, even of women” (Book One, Chapter 7). She is made pregnant and ultimately charged with infanticide for abandoning her baby to its death in the face of her shame and fear of

ostracism in her close-knit society. And Hetty's rapturous reference to "wild geese" several times in Wilson's novel begs us to recall the abusive figure of Caleb Gare and his victimization of women in Martha Ostenso's 1925 novel of that title.

The critical consensus raises difficult questions about how textual misreadings are replicated over time. Robert Lecker's comment that critics who sought "to question cultural norms — to construct different versions of national desire . . . were marginalized precisely because they did not conform to the dominant view" (6) could have been written about Mitchell. So it is not just what was seen as constituting the Canadian canon that must be understood but how those books admitted to the canon (however grudgingly, as in the case of *Hetty Dorval*) were read (or misread) to legitimize a particular national discourse or to defend a particular critical perspective.

The emphasis on the Hetty-Frankie relationship obscures other fundamental concerns raised by the text. The larger social roles that Frankie and Hetty perform invite us into the novel's darker corners ("life's dark places"), where we find settler colonialism, racism, class bias, a formidable analysis of social and familial fascism, and the Holocaust. If the critical "debate" over the novel asks us to think about the boundaries of social constructions of gender and acceptable gender performance, the novel itself asks us to think about crossing other boundaries that separate social good from social evil. It asks us to consider Indigeneity, male privilege, and perhaps most importantly how, in a post-Holocaust world, we read how the novel deals with what I will call "the fascism of the normative" that leads directly to the remarkable ending. The first has been dealt with by none of Wilson's critics, including Mitchell, the second and third barely touched.

Take, for example, the comment by Davies about the penultimate scene, that Hetty "now assumes the 'S' shape of her Satanic and snake-like origins" (140), a view with which Frye agrees: Hetty, "temporarily in trouble, comes to Frankie and asks to share her bed, lying down in it in (what else?) an S-curve that takes up all the room" (115). The S-curve so fascinated Davies and Frye and Stouck (who references Frye approvingly¹³) that one must ask "what else" indeed? The "S" equals sibilliance, and the curve equals serpent equals temptress equals unbridled sexuality equals the Fall (not here seen as fortunate), all of which Frye coyly suggests points to Hetty as the agent of the devil. Davies is not nearly

as coy, defining her as “satanic.” But the devil is not in Hetty but in the choice one makes about how to read how Frankie reads her or how Frankie has learned to define her; it is through her eyes that the S-curve is seen. The choice to see her as evil has practical ethical implications, leading as it does to her expulsion into the hell of Europe. What Frankie sees in the bed, and what Frank and Lytton see in Hetty’s character, tell us nothing about Hetty but a great deal about the ethical choices made by those who insist on taking possession of the “*terra incognita*” (85) that is Hetty Dorval. Her naming is one such act of possession: the novel is titled *Hetty Dorval*, but those in Lytton call her Mrs. Dorval, an appellation that makes Hetty, at least for a while, acceptable to those whose life she will soon upset. When she fails to meet the criteria expected of a “Mrs.,” that designation is replaced by another, “the Menace.” “No man is an Iland,” says Mrs. Burnaby’s ironically chosen favourite poet (67), and in Hetty’s case no one inside the text, with the exception of Frankie, and almost no one outside the text reach out to her to make her “part of the maine” (see Donne 1214).

Hetty’s destruction speaks to the larger questions that I earlier suggested Wilson was asking. The novel’s enduring power is that in a post-Holocaust world it speaks to the fascism inherent in the unconsidered certainties of the respectable middle class, unmasking the causal relationship between “decency” and injustice, revealing the degree to which normative middle-class values can mask — but also occasion — the marginalization, even the destruction, of those outside its values boundary. The novel investigates how rumour and a priori assumptions are converted into a discourse of constructed certainty that leads to a war against female power, the erasure of Indigeneity, the wilful failure to recognize the value of the “not us,” the unthinking acceptance of male and white privilege, and, finally, the Holocaust. In a sense, the novel asks us to think of “knowing certainty” as a destructive master narrative that erases the *Einfühlung*¹⁴ on which an acceptance of difference depends.

Nowhere is the denial of difference more clearly addressed in *Hetty Dorval* than in the relationship between Indigeneity and middle-class values, a relationship that speaks to the most persistent Canadian drama of social injustice. Indigenous people are in the picture from the first paragraph of the novel: “[T]he usual Indians stood leaning against the corners of the wooden station (we called it ‘the deepo’) in their usual

curious incurious fashion, not looking as though they felt the heat or anything else. The Indians always looked as though they had nothing to do, and perhaps they had nothing to do" (9). The "usual Indians" are marginalized observers of the singular symbol of that marginalization, the railway whose construction was one of the factors in destroying their patterns of being. That they have "nothing to do" is a measure of their victimization; they have no meaningful place in Frankie's world. When Mrs. Broom begins to direct the unloading of Hetty's luggage, the rumours about Hetty had reached "*even . . . the leaning, inscrutable Indians*" (10; emphasis added), the "even" making it clear that they are outside the boundaries of normative social discourse and that their "otherness" is an accepted reality in Frankie's world. The young Frankie proudly wears Native-made buckskin, unconsciously carrying on her body the mark of Native economic exploitation. Not yet trained in the details of marginalizing the other, she nonetheless casually uses the word *inscrutable* and in doing so accepts the stereotyping of Indigenous people. And the word links them to Hetty: the "unknowable" Indians who have been colonized and the "unknowable" Hetty who is about to be.

Wilson understands from where and from whom the country's wealth derives. The Burnabys do very well from their ranch. And at first glance they seem to be conscientious, loving, responsible, hard-working, well-educated — she has gone to the Sorbonne, he runs a productive ranch, they care deeply for their daughter. Frye says that Frankie "has a decent father, a shrewd careful mother, and some good friends ready to help her over the rough spots" (106). Charlotte Moore concurs: Frankie's parents are "sensible and loving" (38). Decency, shrewdness, good sense, and carefulness — among the central Protestant values that have informed this country from its inception.

But the labour realities that help the Burnabys to profit ("my mother and father were left to cope as best they could with the uncertain help of nearby Indians" [16]) tell us what those values permit. The Burnabys' decency conceals the colonization of Indigenous people who here are interchangeable parts ("Charley Joe and Joe Charley") supporting a larger system of capitalist exploitation. And supporting it on land that likely was once theirs: her parents "had established a claim, years before, on the families of Charley Joe and Joe Charley at the ranchee near Lytton" (16). We are not told of what the claim consists, nor need we be;

successive Canadian governments and corporate entities have made such claims since first contact. Charley Joe and Joe Charley even become spies for Frank, reporting to him on Frankie's relationship to Hetty, co-opted into supporting the values of those who have created their victimization. That Frankie has "no particular pride in the industry and gallantry of [her] parents" and took those qualities "for granted" (16) is a measure of how easily accepted is middle-class success that results from economic exploitation. And, when Frankie and Ernestine are abruptly snubbed by Mrs. Broom for mistaking her identity, Frankie's biggest concern is that their embarrassment might have been observed by the Indians: "It was rather humiliating that [the] small group of silent Indian children saw this happen. . . . Goodness knows what they would tell the other Indians in their log and earth houses when they reached home" (12-13). In the colonial project, those over whom one has a "claim" should never see clearly the discomfited master. The novel is set in British Columbia, after all, where the potlatch and totem poles were both outlawed, the former because it contested capitalism, the latter because outlawing the poles' record of Native history made the erasure of that history more certain. And one might keep in mind that other violent denial of difference still on display in the Japanese internment camps in the province when Wilson was writing *Hetty Dorval*.

The control of Frankie's moral development is hinted at early in the novel. Frankie describes herself as living "in a glass goldfish bowl where the behaviour of each fish was visible to all the other fishes, and also to grown-up people outside and in the vicinity of the glass bowl" (32). She is in a panopticon, in which she can not only be observed but also carefully trained in the prevailing ethics of her time. Her "ridiculous pride" in her mother's attendance at the Sorbonne points to the colonial world that her family inhabits: "What the Sorbonne signified I did not quite know, but I knew that my mother had, through this Sorbonne-ness, perhaps, a quality that other women known to me did not possess" (16). One of those qualities is evidenced in her parents' constant struggle to maintain "family standards in an exacting loneliness" that would hold at bay "broken fences, unclean outhouses, dingy walls and curtains, and the everlasting always waiting encroachment of the sage-brush" (16). This struggle reads like a manual for the colonial project: how to guard the threatened outpost against the distasteful realities of provincial existence, among which are the "inscrutable Indians." Charley Joe and Joe

Charley have been conscripted into maintaining colonial order against the encroaching sagebrush, “working in the garden and mending the little fence, . . . [and] they seemed to be working hard” (18).

Frankie is groomed to take her place in this world: “Then during the week I went to the public school, and twice a week I went after school to the small Convent-Hospital west of Lytton where there was a nun from Paris; she taught me French, both talking and out of a book. The book was called *Chardenal* and was useful, but the hour’s talk with Sister Marie-Cécile was good French and good discipline” (17). The colonial project is an existential reality: “These hours at the convent,” Frankie tells us, “were the direct if long-delayed result of the Sorbonne,” and when she returns home she carries news from the key colonial institutions: “school news, town news, church news, store news” (17). But as a child she is also fully alive to the wonders of the world that her parents are eager to hold at bay and about which neither the Sorbonne nor Sister Marie-Cécile have anything to say:

It was a lovely ride home, as you can imagine . . . and always with accustomed country eyes roving the expanse that unfolded itself at each bend of the river and road, noting whose cattle those were yonder, the promenading hawks, in spring the bluebirds, in summer the ground-hogs changing suddenly from little vertical statues to scurrying dust-coloured vanishing points; in autumn reining in and standing still to watch a flying crying skein of wild geese, sometimes a coyote at close range — quite a pretty little beast. (17-18)

The sagebrush that her parents work to exclude she admits; the wild geese that she stops to watch are the same wild geese that shortly will help her establish an intimate connection with the woman her parents will designate as the Menace. As a child she accepts that difference is to be cherished:

As evening comes on, the hills grow dove grey and purple; they take on a variety of surprising shapes and shades, and the oblique shafts of sunlight disclose new hills and valleys which in daylight merge into one and are not seen. It is the sage-brush that covers nearly everything, that helps to transform everything . . . and helps to change the known hills to the unfamiliar.” (11)

She cherishes the “surprising,” the “new,” the “unfamiliar,” the process

of transformation, the “oblique”; danger is in the fixed familiar, the “comfortable town full of people” (12), to which she says those who do not appreciate the beauty of the unfamiliar should flee (4). The child is suspended between two worlds: on the one hand, the disciplined and narrow world with its grammar of colonial discourse (the *Chardenal* and her mother’s “Sorbonne-ness”), its restricted landscapes, and its need to replicate the comfortable familiar; and on the other, the relatively unbounded natural world unfolding into winding roads and rivers, “dust-coloured vanishing points,” and “a flying crying skein of wild geese” to which Hetty is also powerfully attracted (18). The struggle for dominance of these ways of seeing is reflected in the merging of “the sullen Fraser” with “the emerald and sapphire dancing” Thompson, like a marriage, often in which “one overcomes the other” (15). Frankie recalls how, as a child, the “cleaving joining waters . . . conditioned [her] feeling” (15). She is attached to Hetty because both are boundary crossers. But at the end of her magical ride is home with “Mother and Father and hugs” (18), her parents who will train her that the joining of opposites is an unacceptable element in her development.

Hetty is dangerous to Frank and his community because she crosses boundaries like the wild geese she loves; her sexual, material, and religious independence threaten the foundations of the exploitative normality of Canadian society. In the same way that the Burnabys and their world control the “inscrutable” Joe Charley and Charley Joe — placing them in a limiting frame as sharply defined as that used by the residential schools (of which they might well be products) — they come to control Hetty and end her unbearable rebuke to their middle-class assumptions.

The need to colonize Hetty is clear from the opening pages of the novel. Reverend Thompson attempts to place Hetty in an acceptable frame of reference, conducting an interrogation in which she refuses to participate. He makes several assaults on her independence — assuming that she has a male protector/provider, requesting that his wife demonstrate appropriate gender roles, and, when these efforts fail to elicit the desired compliant response, appealing to the ultimate patriarchal authority (“And now shall we have a word of prayer?” [28]). Hetty’s performative resistance becomes a parody of the minister’s piety: “Mrs. Dorval sat motionless and then said, ‘Do I have to do that too, or would it be all right if I just did this?’ and she clasped her hands and closed her

eyes and looked like a saint in ecstasy” (28). The reverend understands the power of Hetty’s refusal to be “known.” His prayer celebrates God’s omniscience or “certain knowing”: “Thou knowest each of us though we are strangers to one another. Thou knowest our secret hearts, our troubles and our joys” (28).

Pacey sees the scene as “ambiguous and ironic,” inviting the reader “to react to each remark and action in three ways at once — to sympathize with the curiosity, shock, and simple piety of the minister, to sense Miss Dorval’s desire to fend the minister off and yet not truly offend him . . .” (*Ethel Wilson* 60-61). Stouck sees it as revealing to Frankie Hetty’s “false behaviour with the minister” and the “dishonest and manipulative” psychopathic personality (133) that renders Hetty only “semi-human” (*Ethel Wilson* 132).

The scene demands a very different reading. Hetty’s manipulation of the reverend is masterful. He is rendered powerless by her troubling of his assumptions while she exhibits a brand of femininity of which Thompson can only approve; after all, he is among those who have helped construct it. We see in the minister’s response the challenged power structure masked by his “simple piety.” Hetty’s challenging of his clerical and social authority is profound and, critically, performed as Frankie listens behind the door: “I had heard this good prayer before and nearly knew it” (28). Rather than glimpsing someone “dishonest and manipulative,” Frankie glimpses a crack in the system of controls represented by the minister. Small wonder that her father later reacts with fury when he learns that his daughter has been keeping company with an actor who goes off script, who performs a role but defies the director. Small wonder that her mother declares Hetty the Menace.

Those in power reassert their control. There is another performance, this time an interrogation of Frankie (“I nodded glumly, feeling that a great deal of fuss was being made about nothing much” [42]). Frank’s anger is directed first at Hetty’s sexuality: because Hetty is neither a virgin nor in the control of a man who would validate her being, she is labelled “a woman of no reputation,” shorthand for a prostitute, the origin of which is Latin for “to be publicly exposed.” Frankie’s defence (“Maybe it’s all lies that you’ve heard” [43]) is to invoke Hetty’s innocence and character as a woman of culture and, in desperation, to connect her to one of the novel’s most powerful symbols: “[A]nd she *loved* the wild geese. . . . It was just possible, I felt, that Father was wrong.

. . . And as I thought of Mrs. Dorval looking up at the wild geese and turning to me in rapture, I still could not believe that she was bad" (43).

Hetty's rapturous turning to Frankie — a moment of transcendence — is a call to *Einführung* to which Frankie, as yet unsocialized, responds. But she is powerless in the face of the parental knowing that erases the importance of that memory and precludes her from acting on it. To the Burnabys, there is a clear binary: a virgin or a woman with a husband is acceptable; a woman who is both unmarried and has sex is not. Hetty becomes the Menace, a particularly accurate designation for someone who threatens the heteronormative hierarchy of Lytton society and who must thus be publicly exposed, as was her namesake in Hawthorne's saga about Puritanism in another place and time. It is not enough for Lytton to be wary of what is; the community must construct a Hetty who validates their conservative certainties. The rumours, the stories, the labelling, all conspire to create a monstrous she-devil, a satanic man-eating seductress. Like Torquil the Lobster Boy who so fascinates the young Frankie, Hetty is "freaked." The young Frankie understands the injustice involved: "It flashed through my mind that here I was, all alone, looking at the beautiful Mrs. Dorval, while at the other end of Lytton hundreds of people were paying money to gaze upon Torquil the Lobster Boy. They should have paid money to see Mrs. Dorval. They would have turned and left him" (46).

The older Frankie has become immune both to the injustice of constructing freaks and to the right to be different:

Circumstances sometimes make it possible to know people with sureness and therefore with joy or some other emotion, because continuous association with them makes them as known and predictable as the familiar beloved contours of home. . . . But one cannot invade and discover the closed or hidden places of a person like Hetty Dorval with whom one's associations, though significant, are fragmentary. . . . She endeavoured to island herself in her own particular world of comfort and irresponsibility. ("I will *not* have my life complicated.") But "No man is an Iland, intire of it self;" said Mother's poet three hundred years ago, and Hetty could not island herself, because we impinge on each other, we touch, we glance, we press, we touch again, we cannot escape. "No man is an Iland." Who touched me? . . . (67-68)

For Frankie, knowing the other is not accepting difference but seeing

one's self in the other — knowing implies that the other is as “predictable” as the “beloved contours of home,” a projection of the self onto the other, thus rendered familiar. The “unfamiliar” she embraced as a child is now a danger with which she has to deal. Her attempt to protect Molly from Hetty is a replay of the role her father played with her and Hetty. Frankie loves Richard and Molly because they are “candid and knowable” (68), but she cannot love Hetty, who protects her difference. The narcissism of which Hetty has been accused is evident here in Frankie's desire to see herself reflected in Hetty. But Frankie also understands that knowing involves a territorial violation, that knowing means possession. And, to justify the invasion, the other is configured as guilty of resisting the attack. So Hetty is seen as responsible for the need to be possessed, to be known, as responsible because of her “irresponsibility.” She is seen as responsible for declaring herself islanded outside the prescribed and accepted social boundaries. If she cannot be brought back inside those boundaries, then, like Torquil, she must be excluded from them. Frankie understands her mother's poet as a plea for sameness, not sympathy, but Donne's “Meditation XVII” suggests the importance of human sensitivity to others given the universality of death. It is a plea not for incorporating the other but for loving the other in the face of life's transience. Frankie's word choice reveals her “closed or hidden” attitudes toward Hetty: Frankie defines Donne's view of relationships with the words *glance*, *impinge*, *press*, *touch*, and *escape*, all of which suggest relational opposition rather than sympathetic engagement. The curiously poignant question “Who touched me? . . .” indicates that she barely remembers how she was once more than merely “touched” by Hetty but intimately engaged with her. The adolescent Frankie is only dimly aware of the moral bind in which she finds herself, and she fails to understand the essence of Donne's meditation, “Ask not for whom the Bell tolls, it tolls for Thee,” which speaks to the need for love of the other given the precariousness of the human condition. By the end of the novel, any such awareness has vanished. Hetty's island is under attack; in calling Hetty *terra incognita*, Frankie prepares to “invade and discover [her] closed or hidden places” (67).

In one sense, New was right: Hetty is indeed a “Problem” (“Critical Notes” 142). She defies the kind of comforting certainty demonstrated by obedience and role performance demanded of women and other disempowered groups. What is questionable about her in the eyes of

the town becomes understandable when Mrs. Broom throws back the curtain behind which she has hidden since Hetty's birth. If critics have misunderstood the relationship between Hetty and Frankie, they have also misunderstood that between Mrs. Broom and Hetty. After Hetty casually comments that "*I never had a mother . . . and I've got on very nicely without one!*" (92), Mrs. Broom, in a fury, reveals that Hetty is her daughter. Frankie describes Mrs. Broom's response as "horrible" and "frightening," seeing "this woman of wood and of closed doors opened violently from within" (92). As Frankie observes, "though she was racked and shaken physically, the thing that had caused this convulsion was not physical — and I did not know what it was" (92-93). Not only her maternity but also its causes are revealed, which, as her name suggests, she has swept under the rug and which suggest the degree to which the unjust exercise of power is a function of class and male privilege. In response to Hetty's question, "Then who is my father?" the carefully constructed control falls away:

"You'd like to know!" said Mrs. Broom with gathered anger and scorn, and the words un-dammed and began to flow. "You'd like to know who your father is and you'll never know! I'll never tell you! He done all right by you and it was his money you lived by till you was twenty-one and after, and it was his money edcated you well, and if I loosed you on him now, he and his would never know another happy minute from you. . . . [H]e's pretty near forgotten about me and about you too by now. And you've led me to trouble and hard work and shame of you, and me always your servant. I pretty near left you . . . in Shanghai, and Lytton, and Vancouver, and Montreal. . . . and now you'd marry this man and bring the same to these decent people as you done to me. I'll tell him first that you're rotten bad and selfish and see how he likes it. *You done all right without a mother.*" (93-94)

And when Frankie tries to intervene, Mrs. Broom's fury is turned on her: "She flashed round at me. 'A lot you know, you comfortable safe ones. Wait till you've had your baby in secret, my fine girl, in a dirty foreign place, and found a way to keep her sweet and clean and a lady like her father's people was, before you talk so loud. Shut your mouth!'" (94).

About this scene, Frye writes: "Besides, it is easy to miss the real irony of Hetty Dorval's servant turning out to be her mother. Part of the irony is that Hetty is no freak in this respect: Mrs. Broom is typ-

ical of the millions of mothers of adolescent and arrested-adolescent sons or daughters who have never been recognized as anything but servants" (105). But *Hetty Dorval* is not a novel about teenage female angst and unhappy mothers. Rather, Mrs. Broom's narrative gives meaning to the ethical core of the novel. It is told by a servant woman whose speech betrays her class, subject to the modern equivalent of *droit du seigneur*, made pregnant, financially supported, but abandoned, who turns her anger not at the "decent" man who made her pregnant but at the daughter whom she bore, whose class and gender and economic disempowerment have coloured Mrs. Broom's and Hetty's entire lives. As in an earlier story told to Frankie's mother about an adulterous riding instructor whose wife commits suicide but whose sexual ethics are entirely unquestioned, the man is shown to be beyond censure and accountability.¹⁵ Indeed, he is praised for supporting Hetty, whom Mrs. Broom is ashamed to reveal as her daughter. Hetty is the deeply felt symbol of her mother's internalized dirtiness, the externalization of *her* abjection, the "sweet and clean . . . lady" who is a necessary but unloved reparative correlative to her abuse and her sense of sin. Mrs. Broom replays the servant to make her daughter a "lady"; in doing so, she gives the final victory to her exploiters, reifying the class system that exploited her and completing the cycle of abuse that has destroyed her chance at happiness. Little wonder that Hetty leaves her mother ("And Hetty did exactly what Hetty would do," says Frankie [95]); her departure makes it clear that her mother, like Frankie's, placed social values ahead of childhood needs. Staying would be philosophically inconsistent with the narrative arc of the story.

Hetty Dorval ends with two quietly disturbing sentences: "Six weeks later the German Army occupied Vienna. There arose a wall of silence around the city, through which only faint confused sounds were sometimes heard" (104). Here, too, the critical judgment is confused. R.D. MacDonald associates Hetty with the war's air raids (see Stouck, *Ethel Wilson* 133). Stouck agrees and argues that "The small drama of Frankie doing battle with Hetty is framed by this vision of global disaster and the psychopathology of powerful dictators who for a time brought civilization to the brink. The two sentences at the end of the book reinforce this vision" (134). Regarding the departure of Jules Stern and Hetty for Europe as the Holocaust takes hold, Stouck takes New's term "political intrigue" and layers it with an astonishing sprinkling of conspiracy

theory: “Whether Hetty and Stern are involved in political intrigue that paved the way for the invasion, or whether Stern, whose name might also suggest that he is a Jew, will be a victim of the coming holocaust [sic], is left deliberately ambiguous . . .” (134). Mitchell reads those final sentences differently, understanding them as an unambiguous and inevitable conclusion to the analysis of power and its abuse at the heart of the novel: “In an attempt to preserve her family’s ‘integrity,’ Frankie ‘drives off’ Hetty. Seen in the context of World War II, which provides a disturbing undercurrent throughout most of the novel, this same limited view of ‘Mankind’ exists on a national and international scale. When the ‘German Army occupied Vienna,’ it drove off the Jews, who threatened the ‘integrity’ of the German race” (*Ethel Wilson* 27). But Mitchell also argues that Frankie comes to realize her role in Hetty’s victimization: “Aware of the fate of Jews in occupied Vienna (‘Hetty’ is a diminutive of ‘Hester’ or ‘Esther,’ so that her name sounds Jewish — as does ‘Jules Stern’), Frankie has finally realized the moral responsibility which being ‘involved in Mankind’ entails” (26).

I see the ending of the novel differently. I don’t think there is sufficient evidence to conclude that Frankie is aware of the implications of her response to Hetty, and I think that to argue that position is to vitiate the power of the indoctrination to which Frankie has been subjected and to suggest a learning process that the ending itself seems to deny. Her last speech to Hetty does not indicate an awareness of what she has done: “I pushed her out of the room. . . . — And oh, Hetty,’ I said, ‘don’t come back for anything. If you’ve left something I’ll throw it down to you out of the window!’ . . . Although I had fought her and driven her off, and would fight her again if I had to and defeat her, too, she was hard to hate as I looked at her.” Nonetheless, Frankie watches “with satisfaction” as Hetty goes down the “narrow stairs” to an even narrower future (104).

The last two lines differ in tone from that of the rest of the novel. They seem to me not to be Frankie’s voice but to float above the text, to be a summing up that is perhaps authorial in tone. There is no certainty in them (the “faint confused sounds”), but there is a distancing — an extra line space makes them visually separate from the text that precedes them — that requests a different response from the reader, a call to step outside Frankie’s consciousness and to consider the likely

disastrous implications of the preceding action, implications of which Frankie seems to be unaware.

Mitchell's reading nonetheless remains the most clear-minded that has been undertaken. She understood the power dynamics at work in the relationships between Hetty, Frankie, and Frankie's society. She saw the novel as an argument against the "devastating effects" of gossip (*Ethel Wilson* 26) and read the tragic ending as the inevitable outcome of judgments based upon ethically untenable assumptions. She paid no attention to Wilson's concern with Indigenous colonization and little attention to the novel's troubling of class, gender politics, and male privilege. But Mitchell understood clearly the dangerous power of social certainties to exclude that which is different, whether the difference is vested in Indigenous people or women or Jews or independence of thought and behaviour. She saw both Hetty and Frankie as victims, as was Mrs. Broom before them, of a heteronormative patriarchy that controls the social agenda, and she understood, more clearly than any other reader of the novel, Wilson's concern with the tragic implications of the failure to resist the narrow moral certainties of middle-class society. Mitchell also understood that Wilson was far ahead of her time in raising such concerns. And, finally, she saw how mainstream criticism not only misunderstood the essence of the novel but, in doing so, supported precisely those values that the novel challenges. Mrs. Broom's identification with her victimizers is a lesson about the dangers of conforming to a powerful social narrative, a lesson that those who were instrumental in establishing the boundaries of Canadian critical thought and who constructed the authorized critical narrative of Wilson's work were unable to appreciate.

Ernestine's drowning, Frank's death in a winter car accident, Mrs. Broom's sexual exploitation, the freak-show display of Torquil, Hetty's sad upbringing and public denunciation, the suicide of the riding instructor's wife, Native marginalization, the likely doomed departure of Jules and Hetty for Vienna, the fear of the unfamiliar — remind us that we all live vulnerable and precarious lives: "Ask not for whom the *Bell* tolls. It tolls for *Thee*." The fascism of class and gender and racial certainty fuels that precariousness and adds the despair of isolation and victimization. In *Einfühlung* is at least the possibility of the always precarious self attempting to respond to the always precarious other. It is that call to the possible that Frankie is taught to deny, and it is in

understanding the darkness of that denial wherein lies Wilson's insight and Mitchell's understanding of it.

NOTES

¹ I have not been able to identify the source of this quotation from Ben Okri, but the statement is widely attributed to him (easily found in any online search).

² Sister Beverley Joan Mitchell, SSA, known also as Sister Mary Ann Beverley, was born in Mission City, British Columbia, on 30 May 1930 and died on 18 March 2015 in Victoria. She graduated from St. Ann's Academy, New Westminster, in 1949 and entered the Sisters of St. Ann, Victoria, taking her vows in 1951 ("Sister Beverly").

³ In Mitchell's text, the quotations are from the following sources: "allegorical sense of political intrigue" (New, "Genius" 70); "psychopath" of "moral monstrosity" (Hinchcliffe 65); and "freak of some kind, an anomaly of nature" (Urbas 8).

⁴ It is unlikely that Mitchell would have known that the Davies article would be set against hers, whereas the editors of the journal would certainly have been aware that they were publishing what was tantamount to an "authorized" rebuttal in the same issue.

⁵ The page references in this quotation are to the Laurentian Library edition of *Hetty Dorval*.

⁶ In an unpublished essay, one of my graduate students, Danielle Martak, summed up seminar discussions on this issue, which she termed "the frightening role certainties can play in securing hierarchical structures of power," as follows: "I came to understand deterministic postures as *colonizing postures*, as postures that work to dominate others."

⁷ Which war forms the backdrop to the novel has created some confusion but is essential in reading its ending. There can be no doubt that it is the Second World War to which Wilson refers. Vienna was invaded by the Germans in 1938 (the *Anschluss*), as the final sentences of the novel tell us, and not in the Great War. The dates associated with the café owner Wong, whose father "mined for gold in the Fraser and Caribou in the early sixties" (56), make it clear that the novel is set post-First World War. In "Ethel Wilson's Novels," David Stouck follows Pacey's lead and ends the section on *Hetty Dorval* as follows: "Hetty has gone to live in Vienna with another man, but around that city in 1914 there has grown up a wall of silence — the negation of man's humanity writ large" (77). Stouck, who cites his own article in his 2003 critical biography on Wilson, revised his opinion and refers to Hetty going "to Vienna in 1939 with a man with a German name, Jules Stern" (134). There has been no mention of these strange misreadings in the critical literature.

⁸ Even Frankie comes to that understanding: "Oh, Mrs. Broom, I said, 'why did you . . . let Hetty grow up like this, all in the dark. . . ? If you'd brought her up like mother and daughter maybe she'd . . .'" (94). It is an understanding that does not prevent Frankie from renouncing Hetty.

⁹ "The research and literature on psychopaths render Hetty Dorval almost a textbook study of this psychological phenomenon" (Stouck, *Ethel Wilson* 132). Stouck refers specifically to a popular science work by Robert Hare, who designed the widely used but controversial psychopathy checklist, but he provides no evidence for Hetty's alignment with that list.

¹⁰ Misao Dean celebrates Wilson's style and, though she is largely concerned with *The Innocent Traveller*, questions the authorized reading of Wilson's writing in general: "Moreover, these descriptors all seem gendered to me, part and parcel of a certain characterization of the author in her proper person as class conscious, formal, shy, feminine,

well mannered, an image that I object to, on Wilson's behalf, an image I want to defend her against" (67).

¹¹ In his review of Klein's work, Stouck argues that "international feminist theory" (rather than the plot, structure, and language of the text) permits Klein "to argue for a sympathetic reading of Hetty Dorval" (148).

¹² That the present trade edition of *Hetty Dorval* (New Canadian Library, 2008) still retains the afterword by Frye strongly suggests that the influence of those few critics who agreed with Mitchell has not been seen as critically responsible. The afterword also appears in the handsome Persephone Books reprint in 2005.

¹³ "In his archetypal reading of the novel as an adolescent's rite of passage, Northrop Frye also draws attention to the S-curve in the bed, one compounded perhaps of secrecy, perfidy, and sexual knowledge" (*Ethel Wilson* 132). Comeau also draws attention to the S-curve.

¹⁴ Loosely translated as "empathy," *Einfühlung* (coined by German philosopher Robert Vischer) is better translated as "feeling into" and understood in its existential sense of "coming into knowing the other"; empathy suggests an achieved state, whereas the German suggests a continuing process. The history of *Einfühlung* is complex and originates in aesthetic theory, but the term has been given new life and grown beyond its aesthetic origins in post-Holocaust trauma theory, especially in the work of Edith Stein. There is no English word that quite carries the sense of process connoted by *Einfühlung*, and for that reason I find it a helpful term. For a useful history of the word, see Nowak.

¹⁵ Catherine McLay accepts the rumour that Hetty was behind the suicide: "This is the first record of Hetty's refusal to be involved" (101). And, like Mrs. Broom, she makes no mention of male responsibility.

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