

THE HIDDEN MINES IN ETHEL WILSON'S LANDSCAPE

*(or, An American Cat among Canadian
Falcons)*

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I HAD HANDLED DYNAMITE," Frankie Burnaby thinks at the end of Ethel Wilson's novel *Hetty Dorval*: "I had handled dynamite, and in so doing had exploded the hidden mine of Mrs. Broom to my own great astonishment. . . ."²

I start with this image of a hidden mine in Ethel Wilson's fiction because I am an American reader, accustomed by my literature to explosions of violence in the novel and also to abundance, to the presence within a vast and varied landscape of rich deposits — the inexhaustible resources of art. Canadian critics, as they describe the abundance contained in Wilson's fiction, its richness of natural and social detail, have praised the surface serenity of her art: the detached tone; the compassionate and comic insights into the foibles of the great human family; the faith that remains unshaken even when these foibles, our seemingly innocent but obsessive meddling with each other, turn into destructive or coercive acts, violations of each other's freedom. I wish to excavate to a depth hidden beneath the surface sustained so beautifully by Wilson's style and tone and the seemingly casual meandering of her form; I wish to dig for the dynamite I suspect she has concealed. By her own image she has alerted us to the possibility of hidden mines and so validated the process of excavation, which I take to be the critic's essential act. First of all, I want to extract from Wilson's fiction the violence that lurks beneath its serenity. In these dangerous depths, I expect to find also abundance — a rich subterranean treasure of motives and meanings that constitute the source of Ethel Wilson's art.

To the critic, surface and depths evoke complementary images of light and darkness, the contrast integral to Wilson's art and to her vision of the duplicity of life which allows us brilliant evanescent moments whose meanings are shadowy and elusive. In a striking passage, Wilson describes a fluidity of light flowing over the landscape of British Columbia and defamiliarizing the "daily look" of moun-

tains and forests. Falling obliquely upon mountain slopes, light “discloses new contours”; in forests, it “discover[s] each separate tree behind each separate tree.”³ Then it fades, leaving us with unforgettable images. The light I hope to bring to Wilson’s landscape is also oblique; but I hope its illumination, coming from an unfamiliar direction and moving into an unexplored darkness, can discover aspects of Wilson’s art — images of hidden violence and of abundance — that we will remember long after the critic’s light fades.

Obviously, violence in Wilson is much more muted, much less shocking and perverse, than in the fiction of William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway, not the most brutal but the most famous male American novelists writing as Wilson’s contemporaries. American women writers also shed blood more unsparingly than Wilson. Murder, rape, mob vengeance, and war erupt in Flannery O’Connor and Katherine Anne Porter; and in Willa Cather, violence assaults the peaceful Nebraska landscape with the suddenness of locusts. In Wilson’s novels, a child can slip into a turbulent ocean in one unobtrusive sentence, a beloved mother die almost parenthetically, a wife submit to her husband’s “hateful assaults” as a nightly aside to daily life, and a war, or two wars, fit incidentally into the unimportant gaps within a family’s continuous life. If in these wars, a man’s hand should be “blown off,” neither he nor his family “look upon this as anything out of the way.”⁴ Nor do we, for Wilson somehow disposes of the violence she has released, tucking it away among the details of daily life which resumes its ordinary course after an explosion; or else she separates us from violence, as Frankie is separated from war-torn Vienna, by a convenient “wall of silence.” In Wilson’s stories, however, the violence contained within the beautiful Canadian landscape cannot be concealed by silence, hardly allowable in the short story’s urgent form, or by dense details that attract our attention in the novel, detracting it from hidden dangers. The “humped” body of a murdered woman lies exposed on the dyke in “Hurry, hurry”; the blood of an innocent Chinaman flows from repeated stab wounds and a gun-shot in “Fog”; blackness and the sea pour into a reeling boat that strikes a reef and splits, spilling four people into death and causing the suicide of a pregnant woman in “From Flores”; and in “The Window,” a would-be murderer stands with “a short blunt weapon in his hand,” arrested in his deadly assault only by the shocking image of his own imminent violence.

Violence held in arrest by its own image seems to me a stunning effect of Wilson’s art. At the moment when the would-be murderer sees *himself*, his hand is halted, perhaps (to use one of Wilson’s favourite words) only temporarily, but long enough for Mr. Willy’s life to be spared. Violence thus allows for providential rescue, common in Wilson’s fiction; and rescue influences our perception of life, of its indifference to human needs or its concern, its accidental nature or design. With these polarities we plunge to the depths in Wilson’s fiction, reaching

her bedrock thematic issue. Has human life ultimate meaning, or is it simply — like Topaz Edgeworth's life — a succession of "sparkling dots" uninscribed in a "significant design"? Nihilism and belief struggle for supremacy in Wilson's fiction, which like the darkened window of her story reflects the interior space of the mind — or perhaps it is the soul — where significant human action takes place. When the murderous thief brings violence into Mr. Willy's *living room*, the consciousness where life is centred, he cracks the darkness that is slowly enveloping Mr. Willy; he allows in an unexpected slant of light that can show Mr. Willy where meaning may exist in an apparently meaningless life. To recognize the danger of irrational, unpredictable, undeserved violence seems in Wilson's fiction a necessary preliminary to believing in providential design. Such recognition, however, brings one precipitously close to the Abyss, the empty darkness that Mr. Willy sees outside and within his window when night effaces the day's stirringly beautiful Canadian landscape. However abundant and variegated external nature appears in Wilson's lavish descriptions, human reality enacts its drama in an interior private living room — in the heart and head, as Nell Severance tells us in *Swamp Angel*.⁵ Any human being isolated in this room, cut off from significant relationship to others, must find his or her thoughts mined (or undermined) with dangerous elements: a fear of nihilism, a suspicion of life's ultimate meaninglessness, a sense of the fortuity of encounters that may end in death or in permanent scarring such as Ellen Cuppy will suffer in *Love and Salt Water*. If we dig deeply enough into Wilson's fiction, we strike against the Void; and when Nothingness lies below us, leaving us unsupported, then life and fiction may catapult us into a violence as sudden and meaningless as that which engulfs the odd assortment of men who drown together in the death-drenched story "From Flores."

LIKE THE WATERS INTO WHICH A WILSON character may at any whimsical moment sink, the desert represents an endless Void. Thus *aridity* recurs as Wilson's thematic term for deprivation of meaning, an invidious form of violence that can enter a room impregnable to a thief. In "Tuesday and Wednesday," Victoria May Tritt (who has more of a name than an identity) lives "in a parched way," lost in a "desert of loneliness" created by time — "the desert between now and sleep." Water and desert sand, both vast, elemental, and seemingly empty, both dangerous for men and women to traverse, especially alone, stretch before the reader as irradicable images of a cosmic Void. "Do we always live on a brink, then," Nora asks in *Love and Salt Water*. Wilson's fiction shows us that "we do," while every urbane aspect of her style and tone, so admirably discussed by her Canadian critics, tries to pull us back from the Void, providing

us with a calm or comic or collected perspective that diverts us from the emptiness of spirit into which anyone, particularly anyone of our modern world, may fall. If oblique means of preventing us from exploding the hidden mines of nihilism, means of formal control, seem inadequate, then Wilson openly moralizes against despair, insisting upon the “beautiful action[s]” of which human beings are capable, acts of compassion, performed by Maggie Lloyd in *Swamp Angel*, of loyalty and love, exemplified by Morgan Peake and George Gordon in *Love and Salt Water*, of self-discipline developed by Lilly in her story, and miraculous rescue produced by “dirty, old” men like Mr. Abednego.

A profound fear that man may be an island, a desert island, the fear that leads Mr. Willy to despair over the “aridity” of his isolated life (rather than exalt over his freedom) makes Wilson insist, I believe, upon the integrity of the human family. This insistence, however, raises my anxiety, and like Lilly, I grow afraid of unforeseen “Trouble.” For since we are all related, enmeshed though we cannot know how in each others’ lives, I worry about effects upon my own life that may come from gratuitous and unfathomable causes. I feel myself treading over hidden mines, any one of which may accidentally blow up in my face and leave me, like Ellen Cuppy, scarred. How can I tell what “arrangements of circumstance” have been prepared for me by those nebulous agents of causality in Wilson’s fiction, “life and time,” which are fusing all of us into one continuous family, relating me to generations past or distant whose effects I can neither know nor avoid? Occasionally the long-range fortuitous effects of family ties will be amusing. In *The Innocent Traveller*, Rose attends the theatre (and develops “a taste for . . . the deceits of beauty”) because ten years earlier her Great-Aunt Annie and a famous actor had met as ship-mates, in an encounter arranged by chance. But when chance becomes causality, linking together a chain of events we find incongruous but destructive, I fear its vagaries. If they affect my life — as they effect Mort’s death in “Tuesday and Wednesday”⁶ — then life itself seems random, without intrinsic order. Wilson tries to mollify the fear of chaos she arouses by showing how families maintain order as they transmit from one generation to the next a pattern of manners, traditions, and beliefs. Families provide a context of relationships which give a woman (in particular) a meaningful role in life as mother, wife, daughter, sister, cousin. *The Innocent Traveller* celebrates these roles, but also undermines them, I believe, by showing Rachel as a woman held in perpetual if loving servitude, and Topaz as a “youngest child” held in perpetual helplessness. Always cared for by her family, Topaz seems extraordinarily lucky in her hundred years of cheerful idle life; but even she may not have escaped the explosions of hidden mines. Triviality may be one; helplessness, another. The loving family that pampers Topaz also infantilizes her, I believe, by accepting (if not fostering) her helplessness; in her comic way, she remains forever helpless, a child even when she reaches venerable age. Though family ties are

tenuous in "Tuesday and Wednesday," they do hold together Myrtle's ego, but also they bind Myrtle forever to her cousin's life. If in this novella Wilson parodies family life, creating an aunt who is a "kitten" and a "conveniently anonymous" cousin, she nevertheless reveals its profound ambiguities which her most serious fiction cannot resolve. In *Swamp Angel*, Maggie Lloyd's surrogate family focuses the heroine's new identity, but also infuses it with new anxieties and problems; and in *Love and Salt Water*, Nora Peake's loving sister nearly wrecks Nora's life.

Wilson also celebrates and undermines marriage, which stultifies characters to whom it brings the only fulfilment possible. Married men and women run away from each other in *Swamp Angel*, "The Window," "Beware the Jabberwock . . ."; wives dream of freedom, and husbands of "slugging" or even murdering their wives. In "A drink with Adolphus," Mr. Leaper notes in his secret diary that a man "is undergoing trial for the murder of his wife. The thing that impressed me [he writes, thinking of his own marriage] was that he and his wife had *seemed* to live a devoted and harmonious life together." I emphasize *seemed* because appearances conceal the truth of family life in Wilson's fiction; or the fiction itself conceals the truth it makes us suspect, hiding it beneath the surface of serenity so that we see the Edgeworths, or Cuppys, or Forresters as "ideal couples," much as Vicky May saw that irascible pair, Myrt and Mort. In *Swamp Angel*, Maggie experiences marriage at its best (but death ends her happiness) and at its most crimping. In the same novel, Nell Severance understands that her marriage, never sanctified by law, only by love, required her to hurt her only daughter. This daughter, at first fearful of marriage, finds in it her fulfilment; but happiness demands her submission to another, and Wilson's women typically say they wish to be free. Thus family relationships involve so many complexities they elude understanding or judgment. They become mysterious though ordinary; and mystery engenders fear. If a woman, in a moment of carelessness, might cause her nephew's death, then sisters and aunts, no matter how loving and well-intentioned, have ominous potential. Wilson never lets us forget the harm we might do each other within the family; and since she insists that family bonds (the commonplace phrase implies imprisonment as well as security) somehow connect all of us to each other, she implies that the invidious effects of human relationships are general and inescapable. Within the great human family are hidden subterranean links that no one can discern because they are buried like an enemy's mines where one would least suspect their presence and where one would be sure to tread.

The enemies to human happiness are often coincidental circumstances which defy rational explanation. How can we find meaning in life, the "belief" that Mr. Willy seeks to rescue him from the aridity of his desert island, the faith that Nell Severance magisterially declares in *Swamp Angel*, when we see that at any

moment coincidences may spring upon us as the hoodlums sprang upon old Mrs. Bylow, precipitating her death in the aptly named story "Fog"? Coincidence, sheer coincidence, brings together Eddie Hansen, Mort Johnson, and Victoria May Tritt at the corner of Powell Street, from where the men march to their accidental death and Vicky to her unexpected apotheosis as a teller of tales. What I call accident other readers may consider providential design, a view we can justify when we see fortuity as part of a comprehensive plan to educate characters to their responsibilities and to love. In *Love and Salt Water*, family members meddle with good intentions in each other's lives, but the results are almost disastrous. Though she is a strong swimmer — Wilson's repeated metaphor for a self-reliant, courageous woman — Ellen Cuppy nearly drowns, and worse, she nearly causes the death of her beloved nephew Johnny. From this experience Ellen learns that "She had better mind her own business. Everyone had better mind their own business." But in a family where everyone's business is inherently connected, bound together by inextricable and untraceable human ties, letting others *be*, an allowance that is surely one equation of love, may prove impossible. Acceptance of others does lie within one's capacity. Ellen learns to value Morgan Peake and to trust George Gordon's love which her terrible accident could not jeopardize. *We* learn a lesson I find frightening: that the "circle of life is extraordinary," including relationships among people widely separated in space and time whose lives touch by coincidence, by accident (or design? what design?), in ways that may affect them "perhaps temporarily," Wilson equivocates, "or perhaps permanently and fatally." Wilson's uncertainty catapults me into an unknowable world where, I suspect, only caprice rules. We may be trapped: we may escape. We may be rescued: we may die. Whatever happens seems beyond control and beyond reasonable prediction. We do not know where the hidden mines in life are buried and which will explode when.

IF I WERE TO IMAGINE EDITH WHARTON taking over Wilson's novel *Love and Salt Water*, I would feel certain that fate would be cruel. Once Ellen and Johnny fall into the sea, I would expect them to drown,⁸ for again and again Wharton shows that life is so constituted that rescue never comes when we need it, when we are trapped by the capacious web woven by circumstance, by small choices, weak mistakes, fortuitously untimely encounters, by a lapse in manners, a break in traditions that Wharton like Wilson fastidiously portrays. No one rescues Lily Bart in Wharton's inexorable novel, cruelly entitled *The House of Mirth*. Lily dies, probably by her own hand, and Selden arrives, when he arrives, too late. Only death releases Lily from the despair which time makes inevitable. Sometimes, Wharton will not allow even death to give her characters

respite from pain. They live on in *Ethan Frome*, caught in an incredible web woven of human passion and irrational accident. Perhaps I am saying that for all the similarities between them as keenly observant novelists of manners, Wharton as an American has a vision of life somehow inaccessible to Wilson. Providential rescue from seemingly inescapable dangers, like those besetting *Oliver Twist*, belong to the tradition of the Victorian novel with which Ethel Wilson's fiction seems to me continuous. Though Wilson creates for her readers (and for an American reader especially) a magnificently highlighted Canadian landscape, her vision of life seems as unconditioned by this landscape as her famous travellers who retain in the new world an "innocence" they acquired in the old — whose innocence consists precisely in their preservation of English traditions in the new Canadian city of Vancouver where they come to live with family connections intact. In *The Innocent Traveller*, when Sister Annie looks at the vast Canadian country passing elliptically outside the railroad window, she says: "We shall have to try and learn new ways . . . and I for one am quite ready."⁹ But almost immediately, as she sees the "same sheep, same cows, same horses as in England," she dispels thoughts of a new life and thinks instead, "I am rather old . . . to be able to assimilate great change." But her daughter Rachel is not too old. Yet though Rachel falls in love with the Canadian landscape, responding mystically, ecstatically, to its "dark endless prairie," she lives in Canada the traditional life of filial responsibility she would have led in England. We all know that the Canadian landscape figures in Wilson's fiction as a constant source of wonder and beauty, giving to her themes of nihilism and faith, isolation and love, randomness and providence a richly symbolic representation through abundant indigenous detail. Moreover, her characters need the *space* of the Canadian continent both to effect their escapes from confinement and to discern "the miraculous interweaving of creation — the everlasting web" that engenders their faith in God's boundlessness. Ultimately, however, Wilson uses a uniquely Canadian setting to universalize human experience, to arrive at truths that transcend place or time. To say this is not to diminish her stature as a Canadian writer, but to praise her as she praised "great" writers — for being "both regional and universal."¹⁰

Willa Cather, the American writer with whom Wilson would inevitably be compared, also sought for universal meanings, those expressed in the cycles of nature and the passage of time. But when Cather dealt with time, she focused on change — upon development, maturation, and decline; upon history. She recalled, with nostalgia, a past associated specifically and uniquely with the transformation of America from an inchoate land — "the material out of which countries are made"¹¹ — into a country. In *A Lost Lady*, a novel to which *Hetty Dorval* bears almost startling formal resemblance, the fate of a beautiful woman melds inseparably with the fate of the American West. Marion Forrester disillusiones young Niel Herbert as Hetty Dorval does Frankie Burnaby; but the American woman's

betrayal of the ideals of honour with which, Niel (and Cather) believes, a great country was created represents a crisis in history, the passing of an old chivalric order to make way for a new crass society represented by such grasping men as Ivy Peters. When the "lady" of Niel's visionary dream of the West becomes "lost," an entire community dependent upon her civilizing force suffers. Mrs. Forrester understands her cultural role, that she personifies a dream and must purvey grace, beauty, and manners to a crude primitive people living through a time of historical transformation. Even when she is depleted, without money, friends, or honour, Mrs. Forrester tries with her dinner party to bring civilization to the impervious stolid young men of Nebraska. Like Antonia in *My Antonia* and Alexandra in *O Pioneers!*, Mrs. Forrester's destiny intertwines with the future of the American West, and as time diminishes her brilliance, it also fades the dream that, Cather believes, imbued the American past with heroism. Hetty's fall from grace carries no such historical connotations. Frankie's changed perceptions of Hetty invite no thoughts about the destiny of Canada. The context of Wilson's drama is a moral world in which change arranges for the convergence of two lives that momentarily flow together, like the cojoined Fraser and Thompson Rivers, and then separate, leaving a young woman to ponder the unfathomable mystery of human relationships. Hetty's amorality remains unattached to historical or even psychological causalities (though we might infer that her fatherless childhood, which she thought also motherless, may have conditioned her to the sense of isolation that becomes merely selfishness). Hetty appears gratuitously in Lytton and later in London as a wanderer who brings disorder because disorder is inherent in life and will make its presence known even when it is hidden behind the face of beauty. Marion Forrester belongs to her particular time and place; and when she suffers displacement, her loss entails the loss of Captain Forrester's heroic dream of the future, of Niel Herbert's romantic dream of the past, and of the pervasively shared American Dream. Even Hetty's end in the novel seems adventitious as she disappears into a country where she is a stranger. But Marion Forrester remains an irrefragible part of the land in which her husband and her honour lie buried. She survives in Niel's consciousness as "a bright, impersonal memory"¹² — the memory of the glorious "promise" that life extends to youth and to young countries. Hetty Dorval, like Topaz Edgeworth, both sharply defined but atomistic characters, can be forgotten.

In her own wrong way, Hetty seeks freedom and security, the goals of all Wilson's women, incompatible goals perhaps and perhaps not susceptible to clear definition. By freedom, Hetty means a life without "complications," a term immediately familiar to the American reader because it recurs thematically in Ernest Hemingway's famous collection of short stories, *In Our Time*. Unlikely as a comparison between Wilson and Hemingway may seem at first, it discloses contours in Wilson's landscape that perhaps the oblique light of an American per-

spective can best reveal. Both writers were consummate stylists using style to curb meanings too turbulent to release. Both were masters of understatement: of irony — each creating a discrepancy between tone and meaning; and of elision — each leaving narrative gaps implicit with meanings, often terrible meanings, we must infer. Both sense the tension between natural beauty, which endures, and human vulnerability: “you are walking along through the grass on the cliff top, admiring the pretty view, when — crack crack.”¹³ Either could have written this sentence (though “pretty” would have had a special ironic intonation in Hemingway), for both have been alerted to the profound insecurity of human beings who may at any moment be surprised by violence. Their unsurpassed fishing scenes dramatize a concern with surfaces and depths, as well as a love of the art of fishing, of nature, and of the possibilities for self-possession in solitude. Like Hetty Dorval, Nick Adams in “Big Two-Hearted River,” the greatest of American fishing stories, seeks to escape human “complications,” but unlike her, he has already felt the world “crack” beneath him, literally, shatter as the bombs of war have exploded. The wounds he suffers end his innocence as a young traveller. A traumatized hero, hurt physically and emotionally, he wants to be alone so that he can be *let* alone and perhaps recover the balance he has lost. He needs to hold himself “steady,” like the big trout in the depths of “deep, fast moving water” who resists the current that could sweep him away. Hetty’s avoidance of complications is different, an effect of laziness, indulgence, or egoism. She wants to be alone to do so as she pleases because she considers herself an island, free from any intrinsic connection with others who share her human state. She desires only sensuous ease, at least superficially; perhaps beneath this desire lies fear of the possibly dangerous currents of life. Like Nick, though for different reasons and to a different degree, she feels the tenuousness of her control over her own destiny. How little it would take to throw her off-balance — only some shipboard gossip. “I want security,” Hetty says, “I want it badly”; and though Frankie and her mother suspect Hetty of artfulness, they believe that her plea for security is real, that Hetty is truly “frightened.” She does not know, of course, all that she has to fear, the war that “life and time” are arranging. After Nick crawls inside his tent, “the good place,” he thinks “Nothing could touch him.” Eventually, however, inevitably, he will have to enter the swamp and fish in its “tragic” waters. Neither he nor Hetty can remain safe. *Hetty Dorval* ends in uncertainty, the milieu that, I believe, Wilson, like Hemingway, finds as natural to us as rivers, forests, mountains, and sky.

“We have no immunity,” Mrs. Severance tells Maggie, saying in effect that life cannot be ordered and that in its disorder, it allows no one to remain secure. Though Wilson’s characters travel and run and hide, trying to escape from “Trouble,” they can never rest at “the good place.” Where is it to be found, her women ask, the place where they can be secure? Is it by the Similkameen River,

where Maggie hides from the meanness of her husband only to become threatened by the jealousy of Vera Gunnarsen? Is it at Comox on Vancouver Island, where Lilly remains isolated with the Butlers, or in the Fraser Valley, where she merges into the order of the Matron and her well-run hospital? But here, inexplicably, a strand of her former life as a hunted creature reappears, woven fortuitously into the web no one can elude. The Chinaman Yow arrives in the Valley, and once more, Lilly is on the run, seeking in the anonymity of Toronto the security now imperilled by this figure from her past. Love and marriage seem to promise security; but the happiest of marriages, like those of the Cuppys in *Love and Salt Water* or the Burnabys in *Hetty Dorval* or the elder Edgeworths in *The Innocent Traveller*, may be terminated abruptly by death. Impersonal forces as well as people threaten any woman's security at any time. So do one's own emotions, especially the welling of loneliness. Even Vicky May Tritt recognizes the danger of "insupportable" insights into one's isolation, insights that threaten the security she tries so carefully to create through the meagre "arid" routine she calls her life. Like Lilly, like Hetty, Victoria May wants to be safe. But "at unexpected times" (chosen, one guesses, by chance), she cannot help catching a "frightening" glimpse of "something vast" that is usually "concealed," something always "there" — like "the sorrow of humanity."¹⁴ To protect herself against the pain of "revelation," Vicky May "averts her gaze" and waits until what she cannot bear to see is once more concealed. But she cannot deny this revelation of human sorrow, and neither can Wilson's fiction, though it persuades us also to avert our gaze from the suffering it reveals. Like Wilson's women, we want security and see it jeopardized by life's hidden mines. How can we avoid them — the destructive emotions of others, jealousy, meanness, the will to oppressive power, and the accidents of chance?

WHAT LITTLE PROTECTION WE HAVE COMES, it seems, from an innate human impulse towards order; and when we share the order we create, we perform the beautiful act of charity. It occurs almost always in Wilson's fiction in a clean well-lighted room, to use one of Hemingway's famous phrases. Again and again, Wilson shows that we may find safety in an interior made comfortable by human hands, though when this safety remains unshared, it seems pathetic if not simply ludicrous. Vicky May's room, illuminated by one small naked bulb, is not a well-lighted place, but when Vicky is there, reading her old newspapers or her movie magazines and munching on her apple, she feels "safe": "Here in her room she was at home and secure."¹⁵ In her diminished way, she has found the good place for which all the homeless, alienated characters of American fiction yearn. Perhaps because I have so often identified myself with these homeless in-

secure Americans, I particularly appreciate the recurrent image in Wilson of a small protected world that human hands create. If a "room lit by a candle and in a silent and solitary place is a world within itself,"¹⁶ it is one that the human being makes and offers as a refuge to other members of our oddly assorted chaotic human family. When Vera, near death, enters Maggie's room, Maggie thinks that warmth, not words, should communicate between these two estranged women: "it seemed to her the least important thing that she should speak and make words, and the most important thing that a fire should burn and warm the cabin and then there would be, somehow, a humanity in the room." Maggie warms Vera as she has warmed Mr. Cunningham, rescued by her hands from death. She instructs Angus "to start the fires everywhere" when they return to open up the camp. She understands that a clean well-lighted place offers us the only security we can expect in a vast impersonal complicated landscape that could overwhelm us with its immensity as well as its indifferent beauty, its inevitable darkness, its dark waters, its fog. Earlier, alone in a cabin, she had retrieved her own life. At Chilliwack, Maggie repossessed herself in a room that she had first to hold private and inviolate so that later she could share it with others who come to it ravaged by the sea and by life. "The cabin was a safe small world enclosing her" — this image of security is appealingly regressive: Maggie has gone back to a former and authentic identity; to a place still untouched by time; to a primitivism that historical change will challenge and in time destroy; to elemental needs, like the human need for warmth, touch, food. Maggie cooks, and Lilly cleans; and both women, by responding to elemental needs, create order in a world that can fall quickly into chaos. "It seemed as if order flowed from her fingertips," Mr. Sprockett thinks, watching Lilly straighten out his hotel room.¹⁷ Intuitively, he feels she will bring order into his life, disrupted and left in confusion by his wife's death. Making Mr. Sprockett comfortable becomes Lilly's equation of love as she earns her right to respectability and marriage through years of self-discipline spent in creating a clean well-lighted place for others. If the world were not intrinsically chaotic, asks the American reader, why would we so delight in women who bring order? If it were not so menacing, so full of imminent "Trouble," why would we seek refuge in a solitary warm room; why would women who can bring order into others' lives be on the run seeking for themselves a security that has been denied? If the world were not indifferent to our needs, why would we turn again and again to another for comfort and compassion, so highly valued in Wilson's fictional world?

As an American reader who is also a woman, I respond ambivalently to Maggie cooking at camp and Lilly making Mr. Sprockett comfortable, though I celebrate their ability to care for others. I like the desire of Wilson's women for self-possession, and I am not always pleased at their acquiescence to a servant's

role, no matter how much I admire the order they bring into others' lives and by this means into their own. Guiltily, I enjoy Myrtle's merciless domination of her employer; but at the same time I am annoyed at simpering weak Mrs. H. X. Lemoyne who "was terrified by Myrtle's eyelids, and could be disciplined any minute that Myrtle chose."¹⁸ What an invention — those formidable drooping domineering eyelids and those outlandish soap-opera instantaneous lies! Wilson makes me laugh, and for the sheer pleasure of laughter I am grateful. Laughter may also instruct us, and Wilson's funny satiric treatment of Myrtle sets into perspective for me the serious impelling need almost all her women have for freedom. Myrtle does not want anyone to dominate her — but neither do other characters. Ellen Cuppy initially refuses George Gordon's proposal of marriage in *Love and Salt Water* because she did not "want to be controlled by him or by anybody." As soon as he proposes, freedom becomes essential to her, and marriage seems, mistakenly as it turns out (or so we imagine), "a prison far away with a stranger." Mrs. Emblem, though "formed for" male companionship, resists another marriage, having discovered that one of "the joys of privacy" is that "she now owns herself." For a hundred years, Topaz Edgeworth has remained irrepressibly herself. Oddly, of all the characters in *The Innocent Traveller*, only she sees Canada as offering its immigrants freedom. She suggests a quintessentially American theme — that of a new life in a new land. "This is a free country, isn't it," Topaz asks insistently, as she crosses the prairies on her way to Vancouver; "We've come to a free country, haven't we?" But Topaz's idea of freedom (she is here defending her right to enter the gentlemen's smoking car) is, of course, comically skewed. For freedom means to Topaz being her idiosyncratic self — obsessively loquacious, basically idle though busy, dependent upon others and yet detached — a likeable and occasionally admirable woman who might fill us with dread at the ultimate inconsequentiality of a human life. Having always been treated lovingly, Topaz responds to life with a continuous interest which effects nothing. On a few crucial occasions, she shows generosity of spirit and exquisite manners — when she defends Mrs. Coffin in danger of being black-balled, and earlier, when she withdraws from Mr. Sandbach's dinner party. I like her best when she curses Mr. Sandbach aloud in her bedroom, but that may reveal my secret wish for release from gentility rather than the novel's moral high point. If Topaz remains a free spirit through the Family's financial and moral support, other characters like Maggie Lloyd and Lilly struggle towards freedom through the murky circumstances of desertion, betrayal, jealousy, moral meanness, isolation. Both undergo a "rebirth" in which they act as their own midwives. In her cabin in Chilliwack, Maggie Vardoe is reborn as Maggie Lloyd. In the beauty shop of Miss Larue, Lilly Waller becomes immutably Mrs. Walter Hughes, an identity which permits her a new life as Lily [sic] Sprockett. Wilson

tells us that fitting Lilly with a wig and advising her on wardrobe, "Miss Larue, on a fine creative spree, was assisting at the rebirth of a free woman, Mrs. Walter Hughes." "But will it change me?" Lilly thinks, "Shall I be safe?" Perhaps she can never be safe, but she has become free of feckless Lilly Waller.

Wilson's free characters are also fugitive, running like their American relatives to a territory ahead where they can elude repressive men like Edward Vardoe, Huw Peake, or Yow. They need the space of the Canadian landscape to effect their escape. But while Wilson's sense of spaciousness suggests to me the American theme of freedom (for space and freedom are often synonymous in American fiction),¹⁹ her manner seems alien to American writers, insofar as we differentiate them from the British. Occasionally, Wilson reminds me sharply, and with pleasure, of Virginia Woolf, whose consummate novel *To the Lighthouse* she recalls to me with a work that apparently I like much more than her Canadian critics. In *Love and Salt Water*, Wilson shows the passage of time through elision, as Woolf does in the central section of her famous novel. Like Woolf, Wilson evokes the menace of the sea and the world of nature which makes the warm safety of home so essential to the human community; of fortuitous death described but not dismissed in one sentence; of a child's wish-fulfilment — to see the seals, to go to the lighthouse — that brings unanticipated realizations and unanticipated terrors. Ellen learns to let her sister Nora *be* — and letting others be (as Maggie Vardoe thinks, her husband "would never have let me be") emerges as the essential equation of love that Woolf works out in *Mrs. Dalloway*.²⁰ As I read Wilson, I enjoy her evocation of English literature, her command, her deftness, certainty, and lightness of tone, her confidence in the quixotic phrase, the wry aside, the moralizing moment. I find in her work both the fastidiousness and the insouciance that belong to one who possesses a native tongue as her birthright. But I miss the struggle contained within American writers like Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, or Gertrude Stein. Bereft of a language of their own, they laboriously invent a style that turns out polyglot, awkward, cacophonous, colloquial, confused, but also powerful: a style that confronts, without possibility of easy evasion, the profoundly difficult and unanswerable questions of life. I find Wilson's use of John Donne as a kind of last resort for coping with ultimate problems uncomfortably facile. I brood with Dreiser, whose work is impressed indelibly upon my American imagination, over the possibility that man or woman *is* an island, a person essentially alone and adrift in life, like Hurstwood or Carrie in Dreiser's ponderous and imponderable novel *Sister Carrie*. Perhaps, as Dreiser shows, we are creatures driven by chemic compulsions that nullify our pretensions to personal freedom. In Dreiser, great economic forces, as well as hormones, are released upon the world to determine not only an individual's fate but also the evolutionary direction of a vast society. When Wilson described the growth of

Vancouver, she made it seem, by her simple cartoonish description, almost comic: "Down came the forests. Chop. Chop. Chop. . . . The forests vanished, and up went the city."²¹ Wilson does note that "men of the chain-gang" were doing the chopping, but she disposes of their plight and of the implications of power and powerlessness, and of tremendous historical transformations that effected radical social reorderings — of the entire drama of growth, industrialization, urbanization, and their consequences — in three words now rather terrible for modern ears attuned to cries of ecological depletion and economic greed: "Chop. Chop. Chop." Because Dreiser could not be fluent, lacking a literary language and tradition as an American writer, because he could not reach into a bag of past poets and pick out a consummate line that would epitomize a world view — "no man is an island" — because he had to struggle in his life and in his work, he became enmeshed in the endless web about which he wrote, a web woven by desire, irrational chance, coincidence, natural forces, evolutionary drives, social designs. He cared about his characters in ways that could not allow him to be detached or superior. Never could I imagine Dreiser describing a woman or man as Wilson describes Victoria May: "Insidious," "unimportant," "anonymous," "stupid." Wilson is "cool" but Dreiser heatedly compassionate and committed to his characters. Though obviously unlike Dreiser, Willa Cather shared Dreiser's absorbing interest in characters, no matter how humble. In *One of Ours*, half-witted illiterate Mahailey emerges as loving and lovable, worthy of the esteem given her by the family she faithfully serves. None of Cather's women is "insipid." Each is potentially a creator of life, is herself alive, and finds life interesting. A minor character in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* epitomizes this interest: "Mrs. Ringer was born interested." Though Mrs. Ringer is poor, unendowed, alone, "misfortune and drudgery had never broken her spirit. . . . She had probably never spent a dull day." If her days were never dull for Topaz, they seem so to us; but all the days of Cather's women belong within a large significant pattern in which, whatever they do, they sense themselves a creative part. Nell Severance would have been quelled by them, I think, for they could have articulated fully and precisely the faith she asserted in vague incomplete terms. Even when they lived in Canada, like Cécile Auclair in *Shadows on the Rock*, they sensed themselves part of a process that was creating out of individual and inchoate efforts a whole way of life, creating by preserving and by making anew, by continuing and beginning again, as Cécile continues the French traditions her mother transmitted to her and makes them pristine and permanent by transferring them to Quebec. Unlike Wilson's women, Cather's seldom seek security; rather, they provide it as they make a home and a great nation. A hidden mine that Cather describes is not explosive, except with life, as we know from the famous image in *My Antonia* of children bursting out of a subterranean storehouse — "a veritable explosion of life out of the dark cave into the sunlight."

PERHAPS I AM SAYING THAT in American novels the sense of the new — of a new land, new pulsating cities like Chicago, pristine prairies of colour-drenched grass, new railroads, new openings, new beginnings — stirs American readers deeply because they share the writer's concern with a new American language and a new style. Americans know they must create a style that expresses a perennial sense of discovery, dream, and disillusionment. As an American novelist, Dreiser could not rely upon what was said before, because the city he describes had not existed before, and even as he wrote, he saw it grow, develop, and change. He was driven by the historical urgency of capturing a kaleidoscopic scene that would not stay still long enough to be memorialized. Wilson feels neither this urgency — the typical sense of rush that Americans experience as their daily lives — nor Cather's nostalgia over what has been and will be no more. Her anecdotal ease in dealing with the past in *The Innocent Traveller* seems inaccessible to American writers, who invariably regret and long for a past that has disappeared. Think of Cather's *A Lost Lady* or Scott Fitzgerald's quintessentially American novel, *The Great Gatsby*. Not without reason, the most popular American book is entitled *Gone With the Wind*, and the greatest Southern writer, William Faulkner, shares with the most widely read, Margaret Mitchell, a passion for the past to which American readers resonate as they typically feel loss and separation as their real experience. In Vancouver, Wilson's characters find continuity: as Annie noted, correctly or not, "the same sheep, same cows, same horses as in England." Beyond the city, in mountains, lake areas, woods, Wilson's characters can recapture their own past, or at least exorcise a present they find oppressive; in unchanged places (of which few remain in America), they can retrieve a pattern of peace they once knew. They cannot "escape" from life, as Nell Severance tells Maggie in *Swamp Angel*, but they can *recover* — recapture the past and recuperate from the present. Nick Adams knows that a wounded American can hope only for a temporary stay against chaos before he fishes in "tragic" waters that Maggie may not have to enter. Maggie will not escape Vera Gunnarsen's jealousy, but Nick will never escape himself. Nor will he find refuge with others, even temporary or turbulent refuge, as Lilly found with the Butlers and Maggie with the Gunnarsens. Like Wilson, Hemingway turned to Donne for a definition of human relatedness, for directions on how to deny his own bleak vision of life, one which I believe he found, finally, both inviolate and intolerable. Much as he wishes to deny it, he saw that man was an island — separate, alone, adrift. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Hemingway's hero tries to link himself with others in a concerted effort to make shared ideals prevail, but the occasion of his union is war, and the outcome is death. Robert Jordan lies alone, merging himself in lyrical rapture and in terror with the earth. Hemingway's vision of life is ecclesi-

astical: it contains the vanity of human wishes — even the wish for love, marriage, family — and the eternity of the earth upon which, with an order denied to chaotic human affairs, the sun rises. As a reader of American fiction I feel buoyed by Wilson's way of tucking war, chaos, and violence into the parenthetical asides of her novels; but unlike Maggie, when she thinks she can swim about obstacles, I feel insecure on surfaces, accustomed as I am to the inevitability of depths. Even while I delight in reading of a happy but thoroughly inconsequential life, like that of Topaz Edgeworth, I cannot help remembering other characters to whom nothing happened. I remember Marcher in Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle," and then I feel my pleasure adulterated as I consider the life of a woman to whom nothing happened — though everything in the world was happening — and who made nothing happen, who in effect was powerless? Powerlessness, fear of isolation, alertness to violence and acts of violation, the vagaries of chance and indifferent if not malign forces, as well as the urgencies of economic and social inequality which must lead to conflict — so I learn from *The Grapes of Wrath* — how could I not be conditioned by all this which I encounter again and again in American fiction? Abundant as it is, American fiction is deeply mined with skepticism and uncertainty. Its landscape is vast, beautiful, and bleak. I have travelled in it for many years, and to deny its influences, to say I am still innocent and can enjoy without wryness the surface skimming of a waterglider or even the complex skill of a juggler (juggling a weapon of destructive power) would be to deny the power of literature.

Wilson celebrates this power by consciously drawing attention to the creative act of story-telling. Her characters tell stories — are unabashed liars; and sometimes by withholding their stories, they assert their autonomy, their possibility of eluding facts and consequences by refusing to acknowledge that they exist. In *Love and Salt Water*, Ellen Cuppy tries to keep her mother alive by not telling that she had died, and her sister Nora tries to keep her son whole by not telling that his hearing is impaired. Frankie collaborates in the fiction Hetty Dorval creates by not telling what she knows about Hetty; and Hetty herself remains somehow inviolable because she has not told the truth about herself, by this withholding making herself inaccessible even to Frankie in whose consciousness she lives. Frankie knows she is inventing the story of Hetty Dorval; this act frees her of Hetty's influence and at the same time, since stories last, makes the influence of Hetty's distinctive beauty and power permanent. Through the art of story-telling, Frankie both dispels the trance in which Hetty has placed her and captures it for all time; and she becomes a force powerful enough to cause an explosion in which another story, Mrs. Broom's version of the past, will be released from the depths of silence in which it lies buried. Frankie makes Mrs. Broom tell the story she has withheld, and we cannot minimize the power she exercises in forcing, without forethought, another's confession. In "Tuesday and

Wednesday," characters make up stories all the time. Mort and Myrtle lie unconscionably, and by their lies, they subdue others, sometimes each other, and so exercise their wills. The stories that give them momentary victories cannot save them, however, from the fate that coincidence has laid in store; but rescue does come from a most unlikely source, from the story of heroism that reticent neurotic Victoria May Tritt invents. By telling her story, Vicky frees herself, if only for a moment, from the prison of shyness, insecurity, silence, and a sense of worthlessness; from the inconsequentiality of her life; from powerlessness. She effects a change in how Mort will be remembered, in how Myrtle will feel, and in how an inexplicable accident will evermore be described. She changes her own behaviour, her very identity from a silent and withdrawn woman to a purposeful active storyteller, the focus of rapt attention. In *The Equations of Love*, Lilly's lies become the truths of her life, the means by which she can possess herself and give a happy useful identity to her daughter. Through her own fictions, she learns how to serve others, and though she seeks isolation, she belongs to a community that includes the Matron, the hospital, and finally the wide world where she may, perhaps, live as a free woman with the man to whom she brings comfort.

This confusion of lies with truth celebrates the story-teller's power to convince us of the reality of fiction; it also dramatizes the mysteriousness of life whose essence we cannot know with certainty. As Wilson's stories show, we cannot know each other because we present, in everyday life, social faces that conceal a real identity shown only to a friend or lover. Though Mrs. Forrester smiles and talks and entertains in the story "Truth and Mrs. Forrester," her reality exists thousands of miles away from the room where people come and go and where all her familiar things are placed — thousands of miles away where her husband lies ill, possibly dying. The "true Mrs. Forrester" is the loving wife, not the charming hostess who lies out of politeness and boredom or the helpless employer "in thrall" to her garrulous maid. "Truth is so hard to tell," says Mrs. Forrester, "while fiction is the easiest thing in the world."²² Certainly, Ethel Wilson makes fiction seem easy, though the truth of her women is hard to define — whether they are utterly traditional creatures finding happiness only in caring for others, cleaning, cooking, creating comfort, yielding compassion. Is Family their essential need, and marriage, though initially avoided (as by Ellen Cuppy and Hilda Severance), their ultimate fulfilment? Is Mrs. Emblem, in "Tuesday and Wednesday," with her pink boudoir and her pink complexion and golden hair and her three husbands, truly an emblematic Woman as the story insists? "Vicky Tritt does not know what it feels like to be a woman," the story tells: "Mrs. Emblem knows nothing else." "Truth is so hard to tell," Ethel Wilson might answer, and she enacts the difficulty in her equivocal style. She shows us complexities, gains and losses within a single situation, and generosity and withhold-

ing within a single person: "I knew I was in the web," Mrs. Severance says, explaining her desertion of her daughter; "I did the best I could in the web, and it takes God himself to be fair to two different people at once." One must juggle one's responsibilities, as Mrs. Severance, a skilled juggler, knows; and one must distinguish between the symbol and the essence, deciding finally for the essence, though one has become attached to the symbol as though its glitter were real. Perhaps the truth is that, like Wilson's characters, we are all story-tellers. When we tell our own story, we come into possession — not of objective truth, but of a reality we imagine, that of the person we would wish to become, like Mrs. Walter Hughes, or wish to retrieve, like Mrs. Maggie Lloyd. Perhaps our own power of invention is the truth about us, and those who possess this power strongly imagine a person into being, becoming in fact their own fiction, as Lilly becomes Mrs. Walter Hughes. Naming one's self represents a quest for one's own truth. Topaz Edgeworth never changes her name in her hundred years of life, and her reality as a person becomes evanescent, forgettable — except in the story that Wilson tells. Lilly changes her name several times, and in the end accepts the name of a stranger in order to become the self whom she has imagined into being. Kind as he is, her future husband takes possession by reiterating the name he will impose — "LilySprockettLilianSprockettLilySprockettLilianSprockett." The name delights him and with it he makes Lilly a character in the story of his life. "Would you mind me calling you Lilian?" he asks, and Lilly, either entirely secure now in her achieved identity or else willing to relinquish it for another that promises love, does not mind losing a name that gave her "self-possession." Is Wilson mocking Lilly when she has her confess her secret at the end of her story — that she wears an "adaptation" — or is she rejoicing in the erasure of Lilly's past, once so full of "Trouble?" The truth is hard to tell, though the fiction, "Lilly's Story," is easy to read. "Perhaps" or "perhaps not," "I think," "it was impossible to say," the omniscient narrator says again and again in Wilson's fiction, implying that even the all-knowing story-teller does not know the truth. Sometimes we as readers have a choice, because the narrator, uncertain of the truth, offers two exclusive possibilities, two adjectives or nouns linked together by *and* though they require *or*. Perhaps we need faith because we cannot know the truth. This, at least, is what I think when I read Wilson's fiction, but of course I cannot be sure. Her fiction makes me certain and uncertain.

Of her descriptive powers I have no doubt. Her effulgent images of the Northern Lights, of the perfect V of flying wild geese, of indigenous creatures, changing landscapes, sky and space, are famous. Her short short story, "Hurry, hurry," to which I referred at the beginning, is charged with natural scenery which seems to me translucent. Mountains, trees, slanting rays of light, fog, birds, dog, hawk, heron, bushes, blackbirds, steep grassy dyke — all take on a brilliant and unforgettable urgency, a cosmic meaning whose truth might be so terrible that it eludes

us as the image of the "hunched" hawk gives way to that of the "humped" corpse of a woman. Human life and animal life seem internecine. The hawk "with its sharp beak and tearing claws . . . would have mauled the terriers, and they would have tormented it." The hawk stares brightly, and so does man the murderer, compelling the woman to hurry away as "he held her eyes with his eyes." She escapes, running. The murderer shows her mercy, or perhaps only indifference. The woman he has killed lies "beside the salt-water ditch." His tears must be salty as he stumbles along "sobbing, crying out loud." Does he cry in regret or for love lost? Are love and salt water inseparable in Wilson's world? If some lucky ones escape the salt water, if they are rescued from drowning, is it at the sacrifice of others, like the drowned boy in *Love and Salt Water* or the murdered woman in "Hurry, hurry," characters linked with the living in Wilson's great web of life? Meanwhile, the light falls obliquely on the mountains. Each tree stands out separately. We see each clearly. We see each fade. "The light is gone" — the story is over — "but those who have seen it will remember." The memory of Ethel Wilson's story lies deeply buried in our consciousness, our imagination. It is a hidden mine that we might at any moment of recall explode with terror and delight.

NOTES

- ¹ In her essay "A Cat Among the Falcons" [*Canadian Literature*, 1 (Autumn 1959), 10-19], Ethel Wilson avers that she is not a "qualified critic," not one of the "falcons [who] cruise high above and search the literary plain." Rather, as a country cat, she remains indoors, keeping her literary convictions safely private while she watches the sky where the "formidable and trained" — and contentious — falcons soar. Having been invited to give an American perspective upon Ethel Wilson's fiction at a conference distinguished by Canadian critics immersed in Wilson's work, life, and milieu, I recognize my affinity with the country cat. If I venture out with the falcons, I do so in the hope of making criticism "interesting" and perhaps even "amusing," the effects that Wilson valued in diversity of critical opinion. [ED. NOTE: This paper was first delivered at the Wilson Symposium at the University of Ottawa in 1981.]
- ² *Hetty Dorval* (Toronto: Macmillan, Laurentian Library, 1967), p. 86. *Hetty Dorval* was published originally in 1947.
- ³ Ethel Wilson, "Hurry, hurry," *Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1961), p. 106. "Then the light fades [Wilson writes] . . . , but those who have seen it will remember."
- ⁴ *Love and Salt Water* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1956), p. 152.
- ⁵ " 'I don't care for fresh air myself except for the purpose of breathing. I exist here . . . and here . . . ' Mrs. Severance touched her heart and her head. 'Everything of any importance happens indoors . . . ,' " *Swamp Angel* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1962), p. 149, original ellipses. *Swamp Angel* was published originally by Macmillan of Canada in 1954.
- ⁶ "Tuesday and Wednesday," *The Equations of Love* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974 paperback, published originally in 1952). See pages 127-28, in which the word

caused appears seven times, linking together an incongruous sequence of events that "life and time" effect through "manipulations . . . of circumstance and influence and spiked chance and decision among members of the human family."

- ⁷ "A drink with Adolphus," *Mrs. Golightly*, p. 79.
- ⁸ David Stouck reported to the Ethel Wilson Symposium (Ottawa, 1981) that other manuscript versions of *Love and Salt Water* do show them drowning.
- ⁹ *The Innocent Traveller* (London: Macmillan, 1949), p. 101.
- ¹⁰ See Wilson's letter of July 12, 1953, to Desmond Pacey, quoted in his book *Ethel Wilson* (New York: Twayne, 1967), p. 25.
- ¹¹ The phrase comes from a famous passage in *My Antonia* that describes young Jim Burden's first sight of Nebraska: "There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made" (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1954), p. 7. *My Antonia* was published originally in 1918.
- ¹² *A Lost Lady* (New York: Random House, Vintage, 1972), p. 172. *A Lost Lady* was published originally in 1923.
- ¹³ *Love and Salt Water*, p. 149.
- ¹⁴ "Tuesday and Wednesday," *The Equations of Love*, p. 68.
- ¹⁵ "Tuesday and Wednesday," p. 77.
- ¹⁶ *Swamp Angel*, p. 146.
- ¹⁷ "Lilly's Story," *The Equations of Love*, p. 262.
- ¹⁸ "Tuesday and Wednesday," p. 101.
- ¹⁹ In an essay on modern American city fiction, I discuss this relation between space and freedom. See "Residence Underground": Recent Fictions of the Subterranean City," *Sewanee Review*, 83 (Summer 1975), 406-38.
- ²⁰ I have discussed this thematic meaning of love in Woolf in the essay "Love and Conversion in *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Criticism*, 8 (Summer 1966), 229-45.
- ²¹ *The Innocent Traveller*, p. 124.
- ²² "Truth and Mrs. Forrester," *Mrs. Golightly*, p. 111.

THE HOME OF THE BEWILDERED

Naomi Rachel

The birches guard the straw lawn, a chorus of singers
stripped of their finery.
The old clapboard house, as if touching memory, harbours
a corniced roof and gabled windows.
Its age is revealed in the peeling paints, layers of effort
and the strength of summer suns.
A wheel from an ancient farm machine gathers moss; by the well,
a china doll robbed of her silk curls stares exposed at the sky.