

ETHEL WILSON'S FIRST NOVEL

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Hetty Dorval is the kind of first novel we might have expected its characteristically modest author to write. It is short — only just over a hundred pages, the pages small and the print comfortably large; it is, on the surface at least, simple and straightforward in both plot and characterization; and its tone is one of gentle wonderment at the vagaries of human nature. Above all, it is a book that can either be read in a few hours as a pleasant diversion, or studied intently as a subtle consideration of some of the more profound questions of psychology and ethics.

Read merely as light entertainment, *Hetty Dorval* commends itself to us as a mystery story. It records the reactions of a young girl, Frankie Burnaby, to an older and reputedly wicked woman, Hetty Dorval. Frankie is only twelve years old when the novel opens, and Mrs. Dorval appears as a strange new inhabitant in the small British Columbian town of Lytton where Frankie goes to school. At first Frankie is dazzled by Hetty's beauty, but gradually she begins to have doubts about the woman's character.

Wherever Frankie goes — in Vancouver, where she is sent to a private school, on shipboard on the Atlantic Ocean, in London — she keeps encountering Hetty, and on each encounter she is both attracted and repelled. 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, when she appears to be on the point of marrying the young Englishman whom Frankie has come to love, that we learn of her illegitimate birth and of her involvement in a series of unsavoury affairs with rich and powerful men. Enigmatic to the end, Hetty at the close of the novel gives up all claim to Frankie's young man in order to marry a wealthy German, Jules Stern. Whether she does this out of concern for Frankie's feelings or Rick's welfare, or out of pure selfishness, is left to our speculation.

Even if we look no deeper than this, there is much to admire in *Hetty Dorval*. As a thriller of the less sensational variety it is very well managed. Almost always we are shown rather than told: we get a series of dramatic scenes, each clearly lit in the foreground but with intriguing shadows in the background. The opening scene shows us Frankie and her girl-friend Ernestine watching the arrival of Mrs. Dorval's furniture at the railway-station, and mistaking Hetty's housekeeper, Mrs. Broom, for Hetty herself. The second main scene describes the first meeting of Frankie and Hetty; the third the arrival of the supposed *Mr.* Dorval; the fourth the town fair; and so on, until the final confrontation of Frankie and Hetty when the latter decides for Jules Stern rather than Rick. The point is that each of these scenes is a unit in itself, a satisfying and self-contained encounter, and yet that each points forward to the next and backward to its predecessor. There is a closely linked sequence of dramatic episodes in each of which a moment of time is clearly and perceptively limned, and in each of which the level of narrative interest or suspense perceptibly rises.

An example may make clear how effectively Mrs. Wilson manages this narrative level of her work. Here is part of the opening scene:

The day that Mrs. Dorval's furniture arrived in Lytton, Ernestine and I had gone to the station to see the train come in. It was a hot day. The heat of the sun burned down from above, it beat up from the ground and was reflected from the hot hills. Mr. Miles, the station agent, was in his shirt-sleeves; the station dog lay and panted, got up, moved away, lay down and panted again; and the 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. Ernestine and I had nothing much to do, school was out and supper wasn't ready and so we had drifted over to the station. Neither of our mothers liked us to do this every day; but we were not absolutely forbidden.

When the train clanked in, a number of the stifling passengers got out seeking coolness in the bright glaring heat of the station platform. Ernestine and I watched these passengers with experienced eyes and saw that there was no one interesting to us. We did not find grown-ups interesting, but were always on the look-out for other children or for dogs. And sure enough there at the end of the train was a large dog, perhaps a Newfoundland, hot in his hot coat. The train men had got him out of a freight car, and then they heaved and pushed and lifted out a huge crated object that might be a piano, and then they got out packing case after packing case.

Directly the great dog stood upon the platform, looking sadly and nobly about him, a woman moved up to him and said casually, "Well, Sailor," and you might

almost say the dog smiled. His thick bell-rope of a tail swung and he moved up to the woman who patted him lightly but gave her full attention to the crates and packing cases that the train hands and station hands deposited upon the platform. Ernestine and I had seen this woman before in the Lytton main street, but she was really the kind of woman that you don't notice. You might see her in a village, or in a big city, or in a street-car, or on a train, and you would never notice. Nevertheless, we now saw that she had authority. She was dressed in dark grey. Her hair was dark grey too, and was taken straight back from her plain strong face. Suddenly she began to be interesting to Ernestine and to me, because she belonged to Sailor the dog and to all the new packing cases.

The very first sentence of that passage suggests one of the strongest elements in Hetty Dorval's appeal for Frankie: Frankie is a girl living in a town so small and so isolated that the arrival of the daily train is an event, and to her simple mind Mrs. Dorval represents the exotic, the sophisticated, and the mysterious. The whole of the opening paragraph suggests oppressive boredom — the heat, the panting dog pointlessly moving from place to place, the leaning Indians, the idly drifting girls — and makes us long for something to happen. The last sentence of the first paragraph prefigures what is to be one of the main tensions in the plot — that between the innocent freedom of a child's response and the suspicious restraint of a parent's.

In the second paragraph, the appearance of the Newfoundland dog and of the piano crate and other packing cases heightens the effect of something strange, mysterious and almost monstrous intruding into this sleepy little way-station. And when, in the third paragraph, we see the woman go up to the dog and call him Sailor, we at once jump to the false conclusion, as do the girls, that this woman is Mrs. Dorval and that, having a huge dog with such a name, she is a woman of the world and a woman of strong will.

There are other things in these opening paragraphs that might be commented upon — they reveal, for example, Ethel Wilson's talent for selective and suggestive description of landscape, her fascination with animals and with people's gestures, and the deceptive simplicity of her style — but what I wish mainly to remark here is the sheer cleverness of them from the point of view of arousing suspense. Almost every sentence makes a statement but at the same time raises a question. Who is Mrs. Dorval? Will she be on the train? Is this dog hers? Is that a piano? Her piano? Is that woman Mrs. Dorval? Why had the girls not really noticed her before? And so on.

To initiate and sustain suspense on this level, and yet never to deviate into melodrama, is not easy. There are, it is true, in this first novel one or two scenes that

come near to melodrama, the chief one being that in which the housekeeper, Mrs. Broom, introduced as the woman in dark grey, reveals that she is in fact Hetty Dorval's mother. If one is reading the novel merely for its lively plot, that scene may be accepted as a melodramatic fragment coming appropriately enough at the climax of the action; but if one is reading the novel a little more seriously, one may see that it is a cunningly constructed link in the whole narrative chain. It is, in fact, one of those scenes from which we get the shock of recognition. For, from the very first, we have seen Mrs. Broom protecting and directing Hetty with a truly maternal solicitude, and it has only been Mrs. Wilson's narrative skill that has diverted us from asking why a mere housekeeper should so long and so stoutly defend such a woman from the world. Mrs. Broom's dark grey has been a shade in the background which has been waiting all along for Mrs. Wilson to illuminate it. And what prevents the illumination from being really melodramatic is the very steadiness of the beam when it finally does shine out. There is no vague rush of uncontrolled emotion, but a disciplined delineation of physical detail denoting psychological strain. There is no wild waving of the arms, but rather "fingers short and square-tipped pressed down hard upon the table."

BUT THERE IS MORE to *Hetty Dorval* than a plot which is intricately woven and cunningly controlled. First of all, there is evident here, as in all of Ethel Wilson's work, an inspired sense of place. I do not mean only, although this is part of it, that Mrs. Wilson is a superb regionalist. Certainly she does give us a very vivid sense of what it is like to live in the British Columbia which has been her home since childhood. She is not one of those authors who are afraid of naming their places, who seek to give a kind of vague universality to their settings. When she wants to describe the Thompson River she calls it the Thompson River, and proceeds to describe it as she has seen it:

Anybody looking out of the front windows of Mrs. Dorval's bungalow could look down on to the racing Thompson River. Perhaps the water was emerald, perhaps it was sapphire. It is both. It is neither. It is a brilliant river, blue-green with lacings of white foam and spray as the water hurls itself violently along in rapids against hidden or projecting rocks, a rapid, racing, calling river. The hills rise high and lost on each side of the banks. These hills are traversed hardly at all. There is no reason to climb, to scale the top, to look down. In the sunlight the

dun-coloured gorges of the blue-green river look yellow and ochreous, and in some places there are outcroppings of rock that are nearly rose red. Large dark and solitary pine trees give landmark and meaning. 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.

That is good regionalist writing, for it catches the distinctive qualities of that region: the speed of its rivers, its high, lonely hills, its dark and solitary pine-trees. But it is more than that: the description is an organic part of the atmosphere of the whole novel. The tumultuous river is symbolic, to the young girl Frankie, of Hetty Dorval herself — something powerful, mysterious, almost monstrous, but at the same time very beautiful. And the mysteriousness of the hills at evening, their “variety of surprising shapes and shades”, “the oblique shafts of sunlight” disclosing “new hills and valleys”, suggests the multifaceted mystery of Mrs. Dorval, whose effect upon Frankie is slightly different if equally baffling every time that she sees her.

Mrs. Wilson's descriptive gifts not only extend to the landscape of her home region. In this novel she makes us feel the reality not alone of British Columbia but also of the Atlantic Ocean, of the Cornish coast, of London, and of Paris. And she can catch the essence of a human scene as accurately as that of an inanimate one. Here, for example, is her description of a country fair:

I went to the fair with Ernestine and her father and mother. We walked through the dark quiet Lytton street under a night of stars towards the garish lights and music. The prancing excitement that Ernestine and I felt was all mixed up with the greasy smells from the hot-dog stand; the sudden light and the sudden darkness; the cacophony of sound; motion revolving horizontally, vertically, passing and repassing; drifting town and country people; darting children; barking dogs; all happening together, noise, flare, smell, motion, and the small crowds standing with upturned faces gazing at the picture in front of the lighted booth of Torquil the Lobster Boy.

That conveys very well the excitement that a youngster of twelve feels at such an event. And again it does not stand alone, but is cleverly woven into the total fabric of the novel: having been warned by her parents to stay away from Hetty Dorval, Frankie is “much subdued” when she leaves for Lytton, but the “prancing excitement” of the fair gives her the courage to call again upon the mysterious stranger.

A sensitivity to landscape and to human gatherings is not unusual in a novelist.

A rarer gift, which Mrs. Wilson possesses, is the ability to convey the essence of animal and bird behaviour. *Hetty Dorval* is not as distinguished in this respect as some of her later novels, but even here we see signs of unusual perceptiveness. Perhaps the most striking description of animated life in *Hetty Dorval* is this account of the flight of wild geese:

She could not see as quickly as I could that out of the north came a thin long arrow, high in the sky. Then her eyes picked up the movement of the fluid arrow rapidly approaching overhead, and the musical clamour of the wild geese came more clearly and loudly to us. The valley of the Fraser lay broad below, lit by the September afternoon, and the geese, not too high, were now nearly overhead, travelling fast. The fluid arrow was an acute angle wavering and changing, one line straggling out far behind the other. It cleft the skies, and as always I felt an exultation, an uprush within me joining that swiftly moving company and that loud music of the wild geese. As we gazed, the moving arrow of great birds passed out of sight on its known way to the south, leaving only the memory of sight and sound in the still air. We drew a long breath.

Even if this were merely a set-piece of description, it would be highly effective, for so often the phrasing strikes us as just right: the "fluid arrow", the "musical clamour", "an acute angle wavering and changing" all reveal that Mrs. Wilson has looked and noted and found the exact word in which to record her perceptions. But again we must notice that the passage is *not* merely a set-piece of description. The wild geese are a symbol of Hetty Dorval, who like them longs to be free to move without encumbrance. The flight of the wild geese, indeed, becomes one of the chief thematic motifs in the novel. When Frankie is first told by her parents of Hetty's notoriety, she cites Hetty's love of wild geese "as a proof of her innocence". Later, when Frankie tells Mrs. Dorval that her parents will not let her see Hetty again, the latter says that she had thought she could trust Frankie because of their mutual love of wild geese. When they meet again in a London restaurant, Hetty reminds Frankie of "the wild geese going overhead"; and in their very last scene together Hetty recalls the flight once more.

The wild geese symbolize not only Hetty's own love of wildness and freedom, but all the redeeming features of her character: like them she is a kind of spontaneous natural force, with her own way of being. And the character of Hetty, together with the complementary character of Frankie, constitutes the core of this novel. In one sense, *Hetty Dorval* is still another version of the classic confrontation of innocence and experience. It would almost be possible to treat the novel as an allegory, in which Innocence meets Evil in the disguise of Beauty, is tem-

porarily enchanted thereby, is made wise by Parental Wisdom, and succeeds finally in cheating Evil out of another victim. But although there is just enough of this element in the novel to make such a summary possible, and to set up interesting analogies with Spenser's *Faerie Queen* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the summary grossly oversimplifies the moral and psychological subtlety of the book.

I HAVE ALREADY MENTIONED that one of the chief thematic motifs is the flight of the wild geese. The other, slightly more important, is the well-known quotation from Donne's meditations which serves as the novel's epigraph:

No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine owne were; any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde.

This epigraph is picked up at intervals throughout the book. When Frankie is in Cornwall, she thinks about Hetty in these terms:

Any positive efforts that one could discern on the part of Hetty were directed towards isolating herself from responsibilities to other people. 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 selfe;" 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.

And that last phrase, "we cannot escape", of course, calls to mind the other contrasting thematic motif, that of the wild geese — who can, it seems, escape, who can leave for the south whenever it gets unpleasant in the north.

The novel, in other words, seesaws between two opposed views of the human condition, views which we may label responsibility and irresponsibility, discipline and license, communalism and individualism. Swayed by her admiration for Hetty, Frankie leans to the wild goose view of life; reproved by her parents, she veers to the sense of communal responsibility. Responsibility triumphs in Frankie: when she becomes aware of the destructive influence which Hetty threatens to

exercise on her Cornish friends Rick and Molly, Frankie rejects Hetty (symbolically trying to push her out of her bed). But though responsibility triumphs in Frankie, Hetty clings throughout to the wild goose way, and Frankie cannot quite eliminate a rebellious, reluctant envy of her freedom:

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. She made a gesture of good-bye and went down the stairs. (*Mrs. Broom, to what a bleak morning you awoke all alone.*)

As I watched with satisfaction Hetty going down the narrow stairs, I knew that before she had taken three steps she had forgotten me, and she had forgotten Richard. She was on her way.

The italicized sentence, reminding us of Hetty's callous desertion of her mother, is there to call to our minds the suffering to others which is involved in the individualist's relentless search for personal liberty. On the other hand, there is no mistaking the slightly envious tone of the last sentence: "She was on her way."

The only words that follow that sentence, which comes on the last page of the novel, are these:

Six weeks later the Germany Army occupied Vienna. There arose a wall of silence around the city, through which only faint confused sounds were sometimes heard.

This final paragraph makes intelligible another quotation from Donne which occurs in the epigraph, below the Island passage: "And makes one little room an everywhere." The story, in its modest way, is being held up as a microcosm of the whole human world prior to the Great War. The rampant individualism of Hetty Dorval, multiplied a million times, precipitated that conflict. And since no man is an island, that conflict destroyed not only the individualists but the communalists as well.

The foregoing discussion, however, suggests that the novel is much more abstractly moral than it really is. Moreover *Hetty Dorval* is most satisfying not on the moral but on the psychological plane. The seesaw of conflicting moral philosophies is there, but it is not nearly as fascinating as the seesaw of conflicting personalities.

AT FIRST READING, the most interesting character in the novel is Hetty Dorval herself. The process by which she is gradually revealed to

us through the eyes of Frankie is subtle and delicate. At first merely a strange visitor, she comes to seem in time a beautiful and gracious hostess, probably the innocent victim of malicious gossip, a wicked temptress, a weak woman grasping at happiness, and a *femme fatale*. She is elusive and chameleon-like, and Frankie is never sure just what she really is: to the very end she remains an enigma, disappearing for reasons which she alone knows into the silence of war-time Vienna.

Frankie's first sight of her comes when she meets her on horseback, when they are both riding towards Lytton on a Saturday afternoon. What impresses Frankie on this occasion is Hetty's beauty, kindness, purity, and innocence:

... Pure is perhaps the best word, or spiritual, shall I say, and I came to think that what gave her profile this touching purity was just the soft curve of her high cheekbone, and the faint hollow below it. Also the innocence of her slightly tilted nose, which afterwards I called in my mind a flirt's nose, and the slight droop of her mouth whose upper lip was perhaps a little over-full.

But the first little crack in this image comes a few moments later, when Mrs. Dorval uses the word "God" as an expletive. To the child's mind, this spells wickedness:

I was brought shockingly to earth. I was quite used to hearing the men round Mr. Rossignol's stable, and other men too, say "God" for no reason at all. And it goes without saying that the Rev. Mr. Thompson said "God" in church, as it were officially, and that we all sang about God with nothing more than ordinary church-going emotion. But never, never, in our house (except once or twice, Father) or in Ernestine's house or at Mrs. Dunne's or in any of our friends' houses (unless we were saying our prayers) did people ever mention God.

Hard on the heels of this perception comes the realization that Mrs. Dorval is literally "two-faced":

We remained standing there and gazing at the empty sky. Then Mrs. Dorval turned her face on me and I realized all of a sudden that she had another face. This full face was different from the profile I had been studying, and was for the moment animated. Her brows, darker than her fair hair, pointed slightly upwards in the middle in moments of stress and became in appearance tragic, and her eyes which were fringed with thick, short, dark lashes opened wide and looked brilliant instead of serene. The emotion might be caused by pain, by the beauty of flying geese, by death, or even by some very mild physical discomfort, but the impact on the beholder was the same, and arresting.

When, during Frankie's first visit to Mrs. Dorval's bungalow, the Reverend Mr. Thompson comes to call, Frankie realizes that Hetty is also two-faced in the

moral sense of that phrase. She is gracious and apparently friendly to the minister while he is there, but once he has gone she tells her housekeeper, Mrs. Broom ("Mouse"), that she will not have callers:

"Now Mouse," said Mrs. Dorval, "I will not be called upon. I will not have my life complicated here . . . people coming in like this! I do not propose to spend my time paying attention to all kinds of people. You know perfectly well that I can't have people running in, and you must stop it." (It might have been Mrs. Broom's fault.) "All I ask of anybody is to be left alone and not be interfered with. I'm sure I always leave people quite alone and interfere with nobody."

Frankie leaves this first interview with Mrs. Dorval with mixed feelings. Her beauty of face and voice (Mrs. Dorval sings for Frankie after the minister has left) charm the girl: "As for me, a country child, I had come under a very fancy kind of spell, near to infatuation." And yet she cannot help feeling that "there was something somewhere that was not quite right", particularly when Mrs. Dorval's last admonition to her is to keep the visit secret:

Whatever she had asked me, then, I would have agreed to do, and this seemed a small thing to promise, so I did. But it passed through my mind that it would be a funny thing if I came to this house and my mother couldn't come, that is, even if she wanted to. But I was only twelve, and was under a novel spell of beauty and singing and the excitement of a charm that was new, and I went away almost in a trance.

We have followed the development of Hetty Dorval's character far enough to make clear the subtle and delicate way in which it is managed. What makes the process doubly interesting is the interplay of Frankie's character with that of Hetty: it is not so much what Hetty is that intrigues us, as what she appears to be to the innocent but perceptive beholder. Frankie serves the function in this novel of the innocent eye in whose gaze everything has its own wonder and mystery of being. Indeed on a second reading of the novel one is apt to find Frankie's character even more intriguing than that of Hetty. Whereas the development in Hetty's character is of the sort that consists only in the growing realization of what has actually been there all along, Frankie's character does change as the novel progresses. At the beginning she is a completely innocent and ignorant country girl of twelve, so naïve that a visit to the station to watch a train come in is an event; by the end of the novel she is a young woman of nineteen who has been to school in Vancouver and in England, who has lived in London and Paris, and who is sophisticated enough to entertain her friends in a fashionable London restaurant. But the change is not merely this relatively commonplace one, from

childish naïveté to adult sophistication. Frankie's innocence is not quite spoiled but it is certainly strained by her relationship with Hetty. Frankie indeed takes on some of the characteristics of the company she keeps. She hides her visits to Hetty from her parents; on one occasion she plays the part of a peeping Tom, spying through Hetty's window; and in the last scene of the novel it is suggested that Frankie has become almost as selfish and self-indulgent as Hetty. In words which inevitably recall Mrs. Dorval's speech to Mrs. Broom after the minister's visit, Frankie says to Hetty:

"I don't want you here again! You muddle up my life too much. Please, Hetty, look after your own affairs but keep away from me. I've got my own life to live and I don't want ever to see you again — *ever*."

As if to underline the similarity of attitude, Mrs. Wilson lets Hetty reply.

"I understand *exactly*. I feel for you. It is preposterous the way other people clutter up and complicate one's life. It is my own phobia, Frankie, and I understand you . . . so well."

THE STYLE of *Hetty Dorval*, apart from a few passages of brilliant landscape description, is simple and unobtrusive. There are very few metaphors and similes, although the few that do occur are characteristic of Mrs. Wilson in that they draw analogies between human and non-human beings. Frankie thinks of herself as a goldfish: "But I lived 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." Hetty appears to Frankie as a cat:

Hetty Dorval was a human cat in some ways, and yet cats have sometimes malice, and they sharpen their claws. But Hetty had no malice. She was as incapable of bearing malice as of bearing resentment. She simply shed people, and I only once caught a glimpse of her claws.

A group of Indians at the fair are compared to birds: "The Indians, in small groups, moved always together, as by some inner self-protective compulsion, like certain birds, with their own particular kind of awareness."

The most outstanding characteristic of the novel's style is its clever modulation of tone. Sometimes the modulation is so subtle as to be scarcely noticeable, as in

this scene where the Reverend Mr. Thompson has called upon Hetty at her bungalow:

"Then you are English," continued Mr. Thompson.

"Well . . . no," said Mrs. Dorval.

"Is your husband English? Or I should say, was your home there?"

"No," said Mrs. Dorval.

There was a pause.

"I hope your husband will be able to join you here," said Mr. Thompson.

"Oh, I *do* hope so," said Mrs. Dorval. She spoke little, but her words did not come snubbingly as Mrs. Broom's would have done, but gently.

"A reader, I see," said Mr. Thompson.

"Yes," said Mrs. Dorval.

Mr. Thompson got up and evidently went over to the bookshelves where I had seen a lot of yellowish paper books.

"Ah, you read French!"

"Yes, I read French."

"I should like you to meet my wife. She would be very glad to call upon you, she is a reader too."

"Call?" said Mrs. Dorval vaguely and sweetly. "Oh, not call, you have no idea . . . Oh, you are so kind, but at present . . ." and she looked tenderly at Mr. Thompson.

Mr. Thompson murmured something about "restored health" and then after a little more unsatisfactory conversation, said what I had been waiting for him to say, "And now shall we have a word of prayer?"

"Oh," breathed Mrs. Dorval, sitting motionless.

Almost every sentence in that scene is ambiguous and ironic, and we are invited 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 Mrs. Dorval's desire to fend the minister off and yet not truly offend him, and at the same time respond to the scene with all the bewilderment that Frankie feels as a spectator of it. There is an intricate interplay of piety, sophisticated boredom, and childish innocence, so that what seems at first glance so simple a style of utterance is actually functioning in a very complex manner indeed.

Sometimes the modulation of tone is more obvious. In the last scene, Hetty spends the night in Frankie's room, and goes to sleep in her bed. As she looks at the sleeping Hetty, Frankie is once more impressed with her tender innocence, and feels for her a rich compassion:

There is that in sleep which reduces us all to one common denominator of helplessness and vulnerable humanity. The soft rise and fall of the unconscious

sleeper's breast is a miracle. It is a binding symbol of our humanity. The child in the lost attitude of sleep is all children, everywhere, in all time. A sleeping human being is all people, sleeping, everywhere since time began. There is that in the sleeper that arrests one, pitying, and that makes us all the same. The rise and the fall of the frail envelope of skin that contains the microcosm of wonder, is the touching sign. If one had an enemy, and if one saw that enemy sleeping, one might be dangerously moved in pity of spirit by what lies there, unconscious. I looked at Hetty, sleeping; but that did not prevent me from prodding her and saying, "Hetty, *move* over, I've got to get to sleep!" There was a murmur, "Oh, *poor* Frankie," and she moved luxuriously nearer to her edge of the bed and I lay down and turned off the light.

Just as the passage is threatening to become sentimental, Mrs. Wilson modulates the tone to one of natural human irritation, and the scene is saved.

But the passage just quoted may also serve to illustrate another feature of Mrs. Wilson's style, and this a less laudable one. She is rather too prone to adopt the old-fashioned device of authorial comment, to intrude into the flow of her narrative little chunks of personal philosophy. Usually there is a flavour of irony in these remarks which helps to make them palatable, but they do sometimes offend. However, there is very little that is offensive in *Hetty Dorval*. It is quiet and unpretentious, but for all its apparent simplicity, it offers us contrasting views of the human condition and embodies them in two extremely interesting characters.

