

SERIOUS WHIMSY

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IN THE MIDST of World War II, George Orwell wrote:

And this period of [the last] ten years or so in which literature was mixed up with pamphleteering, did a great service to literary criticism, because it destroyed the illusion of pure aestheticism. It reminded us that propaganda in some form or the other lurks in every book, that every work of art has a meaning or purpose — a political, social and religious purpose — and that our aesthetic judgements are always coloured by our prejudices and beliefs. It debunked art for art's sake.¹

Orwell's statement is useful to the reader who believes that Ethel Wilson's *Hetty Dorval* was written for more than the sake of art, escape or pleasure and who suspects at the same time that her novel is far more than a simple moral sermon. Orwell forces me to ask in what respect Ethel Wilson is a serious novelist, especially when her tale seems to cater uncritically to the escapist fantasies of a female readership.

The answer lies in a whimsy which permits Wilson to render, as the playfully serious Emily Dickinson does, the sudden, often confused and always innocent shifts of the inner-I or the raw self. The whimsy exhibited in the quotation below is both amusing and disturbing as the narrator, Frankie, betrays the incredible impropriety of the childish mind: this mind lies at the base of Wilson's own whimsy and so often becomes the "subject matter" of Wilson's fiction.

I felt sorrier for Ernestine than for myself because no one likes to be snubbed. And she loved dogs so dearly that when she was fifteen she waded into the Fraser River just below the Bridge, and swam out a few strokes to save a little dog, and was carried away by the current and was drowned. It was terrible.] [*The little dog was drowned too.* [italics and brackets, mine]

This is not simply the child-like and innocent whimsy of a Huckleberry Finn employed to expose the pompous deceits of the adult world. Nor is it simply the scatter-brained and inverted whimsy of a Leacock displaying ironically the inevitable absurdities of the human condition, though both kinds of whimsy,

particularly Leacock's, are often apparent together in *Hetty Dorval*, especially in the digressions/progressions of Frankie's mind and words.

Throughout *Hetty Dorval* whimsy is also apparent in a larger sense as Wilson's (not Frankie's) whimsy continually holds up possible opposites of meaning against the simple drift of Frankie's tale. Wilson's whimsical attitude generates a richly complex dialectic which moves outward exploring and questioning the bases of our human solidarity ("No man an island"), and yet at the same time through Hetty and through Frankie herself exploring and questioning the bases of our human separation or insularity.

Though the tale often seems a simple, extended parable, it is really a starting point, an image or shape in the mind, like the Eskimo carver's bear tooth, to be fondled, turned this way and that, reshaped until its inherent reality is released to both artist and spectator. Seeing *Hetty Dorval* as a serious work of exploration, I must fully agree with Desmond Pacey's statement:

It would be almost possible to treat the novel as an allegory, in which Innocence meets Evil in the disguise of Beauty, is temporarily 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 interest-analogies with Spenser's *Faerie Queen* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the summary grossly over-simplifies the moral and psychological subtlety of the book.²

I only wish that Pacey and Orwell had gone further in emphasizing that an allegorical work can be more than didactic or partisan and in recognizing that novels like Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, James's *The Turn of the Screw* and Wilson's *Hetty Dorval* become beautiful and serious works of art as each explores and questions the very premises upon which each allegory or tale seems to be built.

What I have written does not go far in resolving the conflicting claims of art and morality, beauty and duty. But it should help to draw attention to the central dilemma presented in *Hetty Dorval*: which way is Frankie to incline? Toward the languid, self-indulgent narcissism of Hetty? And similarly towards the composed, self-contained and reflected beauty of Sleeping Beauty, i.e., the framed and mirrored reflection of a British Columbian coastal mountain?³ As Pacey indicates, the other alternative is that of "parental wisdom", which seems occasionally no more than the constrained and conventional response of a garrison mentality, but which is referred emphatically again and again to the humanist tradition as expressed by Donne's "No man is an Iland, intire of it self" and

to the moral realization embodied in the close, loving union of Frankie's parents. How opposite are the conflicting claims of art and morality, beauty and duty, the private and the public, is made clear: Frankie soon learns after her secret visits to Hetty that such private actions belong to the public domain, that she "lived in a glass goldfish bowl where the behaviour of each fish was visible to all other fishes, and also to grown-up people outside and in the vicinity of the glass bowl." And she learns that the hostile silence of her parents has been caused by her own artifice, her cunning silence, which has established empty links between her parents and herself.

Which way then is Frankie to incline? The epigraph, her own moral imperatives, and the description of the pain caused by false consciousness assert unequivocally that duty precedes beauty. And yet Frankie's language again and again betrays a falsely precocious realization of all this, a "wisdom" which is not won or not genuine even as she speaks retrospectively. Moreover as with the death of her friend Ernestine, Frankie speaks too easily, too glibly about matters which should be alluded to only indirectly or in a hushed tone. The bright impropriety of her voice suggests occasionally a creature who is as illegitimate, as natural, and thereby as removed from "human" feeling and propriety as Hetty Dorval herself. My response to Frankie's voice is anticipated by Frankie's own confused response to Hetty's bright glibness as Hetty speaks ecstatically about the thrusting, integral and natural flight of the migrating geese:

"Can we often see that?" [Hetty] asked. "Will it ever come again? Oh Frankie, when we stood there and the geese went over, we didn't seem to be in our bodies at all, did we? And I seemed to be up with them where I'd really love to be. Did you feel like that?"

That was so exactly how the wild geese always made me feel, that I was amazed. Perhaps Mother and Father felt like that because they, too, dearly loved watching the geese passing overhead, but somehow we would never *never* have said that to each other — it would have made us all feel uncomfortable. But Mrs. Dorval said it naturally, and was not at all uncomfortable, and it gave me a great deal of pleasure to agree with her without confusion and apology.

Is Hetty's kind of speech "natural" or "unnatural"? Certainly throughout much of *Hetty Dorval*, both the "natural" and "artificial" are construed as "unnatural" — somehow "dishonest". And certainly there is a false ring to Frankie's meditation upon her departed friend Ernestine. And are we to take the rather abstract meditation below as if it were spoken in retrospect by an older and wiser Frankie? Or are we to see the abstract language as a hint of a premature and rather empty speculation?

When we are young we have, by nature, no concern with permanent change or with death. Life is forever. Then suddenly comes the moment when death makes the entrance into experience, very simply, inexorably; our awareness is enlarged and we move forward with dismay into the common lot, and the bright innocent sureness of permanency has left us. There had never been a time when I could not remember my almost daily companion Ernestine; she was my very particular friend and I was hers, and nearly all our fun (and that was nearly all our life) had been together.

The tinsel quality of this is betrayed surely by the exaggerated schoolgirlish insistence upon an uninterrupted constant friendship: how could it really be such when Frankie has described the remoteness of her ranch-home from the town, school and boarding home of Lytton? And if "our" collective awareness is so "inexorably" enlarged, how is it that Frankie so easily reverts to the arrogant "closed corporation" of youth when she and her mother are aboard ship? And how is it that after the death of her father and her sudden quickened concern for Rick, she forgets for ten days in Paris her duty to protect Rick and Molly from the charms of Hetty Dorval?

I acknowledge the inappropriateness of my above priggish quizzing because it is obvious that Ethel Wilson is no Puritan satirically belittling Frankie as she sets her against a high and supposedly achievable ideal: instead Wilson renders the inevitable and thereby, paradoxically, the natural and innocent movements of the amoral mind. That Wilson is lightly indulgent I infer from her playfully coy presentation of her coy narrator — this Frankie who must be like Wilson herself, far from frank. As an example, note, as Frankie is professing her tremendous love for Molly, Richard and Uncle David, that she has immediately before this been checked by her mother for her youthful arrogance and unkindness, upon which Frankie attempts, in schoolgirlish style, to cover up in a way that should make the reader wonder about the authenticity of her tone and observe Wilson's own ironic play over her fictional narrator's voice:

I should like to describe Molly and Richard and their guardian, 'our' Uncle David Trethewey, because they are *very* important to me and have meant *a great deal* in my life and *now* [now? what does this mean, that she succeeded in marrying Richard?] they *always* will. But this is not a story of me, nor of them, in a way, but of the places and ways known to me in which Hetty Dorval has appeared. It is not even Hetty Dorval's whole story because to this day I do not know Hetty's whole story and she does not tell. I only know the story of Hetty by inference and by strange chance.

(italics and bracketed words, mine)

The narrative technique here is like that of Ford Madox Ford in *A Good Soldier* where the unreliable narrator, Dowell, insists that he cannot get his story going properly and each time he is obviously on the verge of self-discovery insists that he does "not know". The emphatic adjectives and adverbs crowded into one sentence surely suggest a questionable emotion. And surely, despite Frankie's protestations, this *is* the story of our less than candid or less than aware Frankie, especially as it is Hetty's effect *upon Frankie* which is continually relayed to the reader — Hetty as one of the affecting "places" or "ways" drawing forth Frankie. And surely it is the reader also who can know only by inference what Frankie is because even Frankie as a fictional presentation is not to be known "directly". In this passage then I see Wilson warning us of how little we know of *ourselves*, *our* friends, *our* acquaintances in fiction, and *our* novelist herself who is at all times betraying and yet cloaking her self in her fiction.

IS THIS AN EXCESSIVE ELABORATION from such a short passage? Perhaps. But in the same paragraph Frankie and her coy shadow, Ethel Wilson, continue to insist upon the impossibility of having a direct knowledge of Hetty. This insistence reflects back all too appropriately to the narrator herself. Because even she cannot know fully what she herself is, she too is relayed to us in a rather removed, indirect and fragmentary fashion:

But one cannot invade and discover the closed or hidden places of a person like Hetty Dorval with whom one's associations, though significant, are fragmentary, and for the added reason that Hetty does not speak — of herself. And therefore her gently impervious and deliberately concealing exterior does not permit her to be known. One guesses only from what one discerns.

This, I contend, is true on the literal level of Hetty, but also true of our less-than-candid narrator who insists "but this is not a story of me", and by extension true of the novelist herself smiling behind the mask of her narrator.

Occasionally in *Hetty Dorval*, it would seem that Wilson is being more than playfully indulgent with her narrator and the languid Hetty, that she approves as Nietzsche might of the unknowing and natural forces welling within, behind and below the thresholds of the controlled and civilized mind. Something of this is suggested in Hetty's and Frankie's ecstatic absorption in the powerful and free flight of the migrating geese.

A similar kind of natural force, undivided and exhilarating, is experienced by Maggie Vardoe in Wilson's *The Swamp Angel*. After Maggie chooses to

leave her narrow prison of marriage for a fuller life, she soon finds that her new relationships bring the constraints of new obligations, and she is tempted once again to leave, this time in impatience with her employer's foolishly jealous wife. She stays, but the magnitude of her decision to stay is emphasized by her contrary temptation to unchecked freedom. This urge is caught in an almost Freudian metaphor of swimming. In the passage below, one can see Maggie's realization of that raw, unimpeded surge of power which the swimmer feels:

There was this extra feeling about the swim: Maggie's life had so long seemed stagnant that — now that she had moved forward and found her place with other people again, serving other people again, humouring other people, doing this herself, alone, as a swimmer swims, this way or that, self-directed or directed by circumstance — Maggie sometimes thought It's like swimming; it is very good, it's nice, she thought, this new life, serving other people as I did years ago with Father; but now I am alone and, like a swimmer I have to make my own way on my own power. Swimming is like living, it is done alone.

Another consciousness, however, overlooks Maggie's swim and her temptation to a primitive insularity:

Her avatar tells her that she is one with her brothers the seal and the porpoise who tumble and tumble in the salt waves; and as she splashes and cleaves through the fresh water she is one with them. But her avatar had better warn her that she is not really seal or porpoise — that is just a sortie into the past, made by the miracle of water — and in a few minutes she will be brought to earth, brought again to walk the earth where she lives and must stay. Who would not be a seal or porpoise? They have a nice life, lived in the cool water with fun and passion, without human relations, Courtesy Week, or a flame thrower.

Here more, than in *Hetty Dorval*, Ethel Wilson recognizes the attraction and yet the impossibility of a life lived for its own sake, just as she implies more indirectly the attraction yet impossibility of art for art's sake.

Occasionally, similar representations of raw force are suggested in *Hetty Dorval*; one minor instance is when Frankie, like a cat, senses that if she will, she can, through gossip lightly dropped, destroy Hetty's chance to gain a refuge or security in marriage to General Connot. Another instance (one which Desmond Pacey misrepresents as sentimental) is to be seen as Hetty, who has found temporary refuge in Frankie's bed, is observed by the precocious, catlike, musing child. I think the scene is one calculated to raise chills, because as the "Evil" one lies helpless asleep in the "Innocent's" bed, the "Innocent" muses in a language which *appears* to be the embodiment of charity, while in fact the drift of her

thought begins to take on the shape of an angry, crouching cat. The scene possesses the dream-like qualities of a fairy-tale. Hetty has just conjured in memory and word the unrestrained flight of the geese, and the queer night yelling of the coyotes and then their even more queer silences. Hypnotically this shared memory, for the moment, takes on a greater reality to the two women than the fact of Frankie's drab flat in London. Then as the older and "lined" Hetty falls asleep grumbling for the moment about "people", those who prevent her from being a free spirit, she instantly reverts in sleep to that sweet beauty and innocence of appearance which one might expect of a child. Frankie now appears to muse charitably over the sleeping body of her helpless opponent, only to betray the same brutality of selfish will which she despises in Hetty:

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.

For the moment Frankie's language and scope suggest an onrush of magnanimous understanding. But in the next sentence, the "fancy language" and "sentimental" tone are brought up short and made questionable by the shrillness of Frankie's perception of human helplessness as it is enclosed in the grotesque Donne-like image ("the frail envelope of skin") and yet more bluntly by the violently plain word "prodded":

The rise and 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 generously moved in pity of spirit by what lies there, unconscious. I looked at Hetty and could almost forgive her because she was Hetty, sleeping; but that did not prevent me from prodding her and saying "Hetty, *move* over. I've got to sleep!"

Frankie's understandable rancour is seen more emphatically:

I lay there trying to be as comfortable as I could in one third of my own single bed, and trying to go to sleep. Little by little Hetty relaxed into a spacious S again. I got out of bed, furious, turned back the bedclothes, woke her and said, "HETTY, MOVE OVER" and gave her an almighty smack on her round silken bottom.

The capitalized and alliterated S's, the obviously unwanted touch, and throughout the book the lurid suggestions of Hetty as the Scarlet Woman — all this

suggests that the contact here is sexual and is to be violently resisted. And yet even here, Wilson's playfully deliberate language, especially her alliteration, suggests a droll undercutting of this kind of serious moral or sexual allegory.

EVEN GREATER COMPLEXITY is to be found in the climax of *Hetty Dorval*. Comic counterpoint, melodrama and ominous overtone are arranged in strange combination. Before the scene of confrontation where Frankie challenges Hetty (like the governess in the *Turn of the Screw* confronting her evil apparitions), Hetty is presented as an ominous force in opposition to any natural (in this context, "humane") harmony. This presentation is achieved in part by a simple juxtaposition implying conflicting opposites. Speaking of Cliff House, Frankie says:

It was all natural and completely young and happy. Nothing spoiled the harmony and confidence of our lives together, whether we were all together, whether we were apart, or whether in Cliff House by the sea.] [*I had not thought of Hetty Dorval for a long time.*]

(italics and brackets, mine)

In the next chapter and next sentence, Frankie abruptly reports the death of her father. I am not arguing that Hetty is presented as the cause of this death, but I am arguing that Hetty and destruction are continually associated together. Again, as Frankie has returned to London and is musing upon Hetty, she explicitly links destruction and Hetty: "And I was sure that if Hetty in an idle or lonely moment entered the integrity of Cliff House, she would later as idly depart and leave a wreckage behind." Then as she describes the London night "growl[ing] gently about [her] for miles", she moves abruptly and, apparently, digressively to a "prevision of craters, rubble and death". The passage relates obviously to the motif of our fragile mortality, a recurring echo of Donne, and is more obviously a prevision of the air raids of the World War II. Here then large demonic forces and Hetty Dorval are closely associated:

For what you are destined, you arrogant man, walking unhurriedly along St. James's Street? And you, you rolling bus with your load? And you, hurrying waiter? What awaits us all? But as I walked through the rain in Hyde Park to take my bus to Hetty's, the skies above London were still empty. Paula's father was a journalist, whose territory was Middle Europe, and from him Paula and I had caught the feeling of pre-vision with the oncoming months, but more than anywhere in London, which speaks through air and stone, wall and pavement.

This forbidding vision of general disaster encloses and magnified the smaller drama of Hetty and Frankie, and anticipates the close of the book. There, in two sentences, the reader discovers that Hetty has found no pleasant refuge in Vienna: instead she exists at the centre of the imminent war which is about to unleash its destructive forces upon the whole world. There is more here surely than the ironic justice of an imprisoned Hetty receiving her due, for throughout the whole novel Hetty herself has been represented as the embodiment of an attractive yet destructive force of nature. The last passage:

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

As always Hetty has apparently desired to be left alone in peace but has become instead the source of chaos for others.

It would be wrong then to emphasize too much the harmlessness and insignificance of Ethel Wilson's droll and often indulgent whimsy: Hetty too obviously stands as a warning against self-indulgence. And yet even here Wilson's whimsy and her heavy artificiality serve to undercut and to bring into question Frankie's high sense of mission as she sets out to check the self-indulgent and destructive Hetty.

The climax then is strangely mixed. A serious confrontation and revelation are being worked out, and yet the verisimilitude of character, action and thought is being undercut by a whimsically and yet deliberately inappropriate language. Immediately before the confrontation, Frankie's purposes are made questionable by her high, almost euphoric sense of mission. Already I have alluded to Frankie's disposition to abstract or allegorize her conflict with Hetty into a crusade of manichaeon proportions, especially as she speaks of herself and Hetty in terms of "forces". Unlike Henry James's governess, however, she is presented as having sufficient self-awareness to be "wary enough to suspect the queer exhilaration that [she] felt". As Frankie approaches Hetty's lair, Mrs. Broom is mistakenly reduced to the simplistic image of the woman who does "nothing but close doors all her life". And yet this false reduction of Mrs. Broom and the misplacing of Mrs. Broom outside the focus of light in which the two antagonists are to meet is beautifully and dramatically appropriate because the light, like the small drama, and like the polarization of simple opposites, is false. The scene then, at this point, instead of becoming tragic, becomes comically inverted. Though it *would* be appropriate for Hetty in any event to reduce her opponent in her easy and

feline way, she does it so aptly that the reader must question the mainspring of Frankie's actions and smile at the right thing done for the wrong reason.

"*What* is it, Frankie?" she asked beguilingly, "you funny child. You appear — I remember before — with the air of one making portentous announcements. Is it your rôle? You have become too serious, Frankie. Wasn't Paris gay enough? I like your hair. It looks nice. Very smart. Pull up that fat little chair."

Not only does Hetty point to Frankie's false, histrionic gestures; she construes Frankie's desire to protect as really the desire to possess: "... my dear little prig. . . . you're in love with Richard yourself and you're very jealous".

If then the over-simplified opposites of the confrontation have been presented as false, one might expect a straight and more genuine statement in Wilson's naturalistic rendering of Mrs. Broom's declaration that she is Hetty Dorval's mother. But even here, there is a strange combination of the artificial and the real. Such an unexpected revelation, one might argue, belongs only as an acceptable convention in a melodrama or romance. And yet, Wilson is surely creating an artificiality which draws attention to itself. Note in the quotation below, how much the language suggests the self-conscious, analytic and geometric conceptions of the cubist painter:

Hetty and I stared at this controlled woman who stood shaking by the table, steadying herself with her strong hands *flat* on the table within the *circle* of the *lamplight*. I stood up *straight* and saw her hands *square* and rough and the fingers short and *square*-tipped pressed down hard on the table to prevent their shaking as Mrs. Broom was shaking. The lower part of Mrs. Broom's face was in *shadow* but on her forehead I saw the veins stand out on the temples and then I saw that the whole face was distorted. I cannot tell you how horrible this was and how frightening, to see this woman of wood and of closed doors opened violently from within with great suddenness and without reason. Hetty put her hands on the couch each side of her and leaned backwards as though to spring away. She looked in horror at Mrs. Broom who, still leaning toward the table, struggled to *compose* herself.

Out of the elegant lines, then, of a drawing room comedy breaks forth the unexpected and violent announcement of Hetty Dorval's parentage, and the heroic yet ugly strength of Mrs. Broom. The ugliness of this strong woman is emphasized by her lamplit hands, "red . . . swollen and congested", and by her coarse language which breaks out like a curse against the measured, elevated and false language of the heretofore drawing room comedy:

She flashed round at me. "A lot you know, you comfortable safe ones. Wait till you've had your baby in secret, my fine girl, in a dirty foreign place, and found a way to keep her sweet and clean and a lady like her father's people was, before you talk so loud. Shut your mouth!"

I am not attempting to suggest that Wilson so modulates the tones of her novel that she achieves here a sudden and powerful and naked statement which transcends the rather ironic whimsy that has characterized so much of *Hetty Dorval*. Certainly an unexpected door is opened by Mrs. Broom's words and a level of meaning much larger than the false confrontation of opposites: the roughness and ugliness of this loving woman is very far removed from the definitions of love to be found in traditional humanism and in the elegance and detachment of Donne's *Meditation (xvi)*.

Mrs. Broom, a discordant note of naturalism breaking out of the ritualized confrontation, indicates once more the richness of Ethel Wilson's vision, her ironic and serious awareness that this powerful, even heroic, love of Mrs. Broom's is founded upon a force as natural, violent and irrational as the blindly possessive instinct of a female cat or dog for its own offspring, a force not unrelated to the raw impulses of both Hetty and Frankie. Though nowhere else in *Hetty Dorval* is there such plain speaking as one finds in Mrs. Broom, even here Wilson renders her character in such a way that she is more than an allegorical type, more than a simple vehicle expressing the novelist's message. For Mrs. Broom is not the naked embodiment of an idea: she has too contrivedly been dramatically presented in her naturalism as a counterpoint to the melodrama of the simplistic confrontation of opposites. The nakedness of her plain speaking opens up new vistas of ironic meaning as Ethel Wilson uncovers once more the unexpected or overlooked foundations, both beautiful and ugly, of human impulse, especially the "human" impulse of love.

I end this essay abruptly because the book ends abruptly and undramatically. We do not know what becomes of Mrs. Broom. We do not find out whether the fruit of Frankie's battle is marriage to Richard. And we do not know whether the "confused sounds" sometimes heard from Vienna are the trapped sounds of a Hetty Dorval wanting to get out, or whether they are simply the discord of war, or the cries of an inevitably distressed human condition. Like Wilson's whimsical voice, this ending provokes the reader to question and to explore "obvious" realities like "love" and "responsibility" without expecting simple answers. In this sense, *Hetty Dorval* is a serious or genuine work of art.

NOTES

- ¹ George Orwell, "The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda", *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, Vol. II, (London, 1968).
- ² Desmond Pacey, "The Innocent Eye: The Art of Ethel Wilson", *Queen's Quarterly*, No. 61 (Spring 1954), 48-49. And see Pacey's *Ethel Wilson* (New York, 1967), especially chapter 2, "Hetty Dorval" and the concluding chapter. I think Pacey makes Wilson sound far too tame, too harmlessly optimistic, especially in his consideration of Frankie's "innocence" and her later "responsibility". Pacey's statement below can only lead to unfortunate simplification if it be applied to *Hetty Dorval*: "The Development is *almost always* in the direction of greater wisdom, tolerance and understanding: life, for Mrs. Wilson as for E. M. Forster, is largely a matter of development of the undeveloped heart. In *almost all* her novels, her chief protagonists confront a crisis or series of crises which shock them out of complacent egoism into some kind of self-surrender or self-transcendence." My italics point to Pacey's own awareness of the limitations of his generalization, but I still insist that generally he makes Wilson and particularly he makes *Hetty Dorval* far too tame.
- ³ This artificial beauty, an analogue of Hetty Dorval, Frankie finds far more pleasing and memorable than the "real" mountains or "real" people — "more lasting even than the cheerful reality of old Mrs. Richards beaming anxiously behind a large brown teapot. . . ."
- ⁴ In the terms of this book, can such a closed or insular harmony and pleasure be genuine? Similarly, can the insular closeness of Frankie's parents be genuine? See the innocent but still mushy account in Sister Marie-Cécile's letter, p. 61. Wilson at least does manage to achieve some credible distance from this embarrassment by speaking through the nun.

KERAMEIKOS CEMETERY

Al Purdy

So old that only traces of death remain
 for death is broken with the broken stones
 as if convivial party-goers came
 and talked so long to friends they stayed
 to hear the night birds call their children home

All over Athens rooster voices wake
 the past converses with itself and time
 is like a plow that turns up yesterday
 I move and all around — : the marketplace
 where something tugs my sleeves as I go by