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"…And Ridiculous to be from North Dakota": An Analysis of the Work and Literary Reputation of Lois Phillips Hudson

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". . . AND RIDICULOUS TO BE FROM NORTH DAKOTA": AN ANALYSIS OF THE WORK AND LITERARY REPUTATION OF LOIS PHILLIPS HUDSON

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This Thesis submitted by E. Roxanne Peters in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota is hereby approved by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done.

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ABSTRACT

Lois Phillips Hudson, novelist, was born in Jamestown, North Dakota. Her novel, The Bones of Plenty, 1962, is the story of a North Dakota family's struggle to survive against the combined forces of Drought and Depression in the 1930's. Her collection of short narratives, Reapers of the Dust, 1964, restates some of the same details and themes. Many of the stories in the collection are also set in North Dakota. In general, frustration, disappointment and failure characterize the two works.

Ms. Hudson's novel was praised in many major American newspapers. It was discussed by Gordon Webber in The Saturday Review. The novel was also published by William Heineman Limited, London, in 1964. British reviewers found the book praiseworthy.

Reapers of the Dust was favorably reviewed in the Chicago Tribune Books Today, the Denver Post and The Nation.

Aside from reviews, Hudson's work has received little consideration. This fact can be attributed somewhat to a general lack of interest in Midwestern literature. But the fact that she has not published extensively no doubt also helps to explain why her work has not generated critical attention. It is expected that she will publish another novel in the near future. A new book will probably arouse interest from the growing number of scholars who are now concerned with literature of the Midwest.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Lois Phillips Hudson was born in Jamestown, North Dakota, in 1927. Most of her published fiction is autobiographical, describing and recording the events of a Depression childhood. Her novel, The Bones of Plenty, was published in 1962. It is a long narrative, chronicling prairie farm life during the depression and drought years of the 1930's. Commonly regarded as regional literature, it was, given the subject matter and the setting, nevertheless surprisingly widely reviewed and well received. In 1964 she published a collection of short works entitled Reapers of the Dust. The collection reiterates some of the same details of prairie life and restates the same literary themes.

Lois Hudson's work seems to be motivated by a need to examine and discuss the forces that manipulate, govern and control man. In her fiction she does not proffer any pat, tidy solutions to the human condition. She describes the predicament of man in an environment where he has neither choice nor control. In her novel, The Bones of Plenty, a relentless, inexplicable force breaks down man's faith in himself and his institutions; it capriciously or ruthlessly destroys all man's accomplishments, is responsible for the unmitigated failure that dominates the novel. The force is ubiquitous, omnipotent; it exposes man's impotence in the face of the unchanging problems of human existence.

In her collection of short stories, Reapers of the Dust, Lois Hudson is frequently more philosophical, providing answers to questions as well as posing them, taking time to describe classic rural American Halloween pranks and country church Christmas programs. But the collection is still guided by the acknowledgement that man, his traditions, his institutions, even his civilization, is fragile and helpless.

The dominating force of Lois Hudson's fiction is as extensive as the plight of the world's farmers who are essentially in bondage to their respective political and economic systems; it is as limited and individual as one man's survival-motivated treachery against his neighbor. It is the circumstances which created the drought and the depression of the 1930's. It is simultaneously the greedy Wall Street speculator, the manipulative middleman, and the dry, corroding wind and the rain-less clouds that sweep the North Dakota prairies. It is a cold wave, a heat wave, a well that goes dry.

Recognizing Hudson's frequent use of Biblical allusion, it seems reasonable to look to Biblical exegesis for prototypes to help explain man's vulnerability to a malevolent power. The most sympathetic of the characters in her novel, Will Shepard, reminds the reader of the Biblical Job. The Book of Job belongs to a category of Biblical writings referred to as Wisdom literature:

> Wisdom literature was of two main types that apparently represented divergent tendencies. The first is represented in the Bible by the Book of Proverbs . . . the second by Job and Ecclesiastes. . . . [The Book of Job] is in fact, among other things, a searching criticism of the doctrine of reward and punishment. . . . The recurrent problem of the suffering of a just man is presented dramatically. . . . Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth) comprises a series of soliloquies on the theme that man's earthly existence and his struggles to achieve and to understand are as futile and ephemeral as a breath of air, <u>because the conditions and experiences of his life are</u>

> determined inexorably by an inscrutable power. [My emphasis.] . . . To Job, God has temporarily and incomprehensibly withdrawn into the mystery of His being; to Qoheleth, God is no more than a name for the incomprehensible power which has created the unalterable conditions of man's existence and determines his fate (Scott, 1965, pp. XIX, XX, XXI).

Like the unknown authors of Wisdom literature, Ms. Hudson, as artist, is part of the secular arm of instruction (Pope, 1965). Ms. Hudson is committed to the idea that it is the role of the artist to instruct. She says:

> I do not believe that either the psychiatrists or astronauts will ever tell us as much about the universe as artists always have and always will. That artists must be responsible for articulating the things our species must know to remain civilized is such a truism that I hesitate to refer to it; yet American writers seem often to be unaware of this responsibility (Contemporary Authors, 1963).

In The Bones of Plenty, she illustrates the failure of a cultural and economic system to protect against the failure of an individual, and consequentially his family. It is not a treatise on reform, nor is it exactly an indictment. She describes her work as "apocalyptic" literature--literature conceived "out of despair over human conditions" (Harpers, 1961, p. 24).

The plot of the novel is simple--George Armstrong Custer's unsuccessful struggle against circumstance. Interest is sustained and the theme is developed almost exclusively through characterization rather than through action. The Bones of Plenty is primarily a philosophical, cerebral novel, as opposed to one that is dominated by the action or events of the plot such as a picaresque novel. The ideas the author wants delineated are demonstrated by the thoughts and dialogue of the characters. What little action there is ties logically into the development of character, which, in turn, contributes to the development

of the theme that "the conditions and experiences of . . . [man's] life are determined inexorably by an inscrutable power" (Scott, 1965).

Each central character in the novel, consciously or not, defines the "inscrutable power" from the framework of his own experiences; each gives it a different name. As each character attempts to understand in an individual, personal way, it exerts its inexorable pressure to shape each character into his own particular mold. Each character's personality is explained in terms of how he reacts or tries to explain the power that dominates his life.

George Armstrong Custer is the major character in the novel; he is the author's physical symbol for the indefinable force. Around him, who understands neither the power nor its origin, the other characters revolve and illuminate the force. George is so desperately caught up in a fight for survival that he scarcely perceives its influence. When it intrudes into his consciousness, his paranoid, pragmatic nature only allows him to understand in terms of nameless but human or at least identifiable enemies. George's wife, Rachel, is also trapped by the actual business of survival. Rachel is limited in her response to empty questioning. Lucy, like her mother Rachel, is also filled with questions about the nature of life and the human condition.

In contrast to their daughter and son-in-law, Rachel and George, both Rose and Will Shepard have come to terms with the force and its effects. Each has defined it according to his own individual disposition. Rose, rather simplistically but not without regret, identifies it as the devil's work, "the mark of the beast." She is sure that it is man's violation of God's laws that is responsible for their "living in

the Thousand Years of the Beast" (Hudson, 1964, p. 134). Will, like the Biblical Job, sees the governing influence as a manifestation of sovereign laws--inscrutable, inescapable laws that man does not often understand but that he must acknowledge. And although both Rose and Will can identify and individually define it, they cannot understand its influence on their son, Stuart. Nor does Stuart ever come to understand how the force has shaped him.

The minor characters are affected as well as the central ones. Otto Wilkes is the remnant member of a once wealthy and powerful family. The author does not explain how Otto came to be the nearly destitute dead-beat that he is. It seems logical to assume that his situation is included to demonstrate that the principle is in effect with the same indifferent but unrelenting maleficence for everyone.

CHAPTER II

THE BONES OF PLENTY

The Bones of Plenty is not just a narrative of rural life; it is not merely a chronicle of a family s failure. There are few examples of rural social life; there is almost no humor. The novel is unremittingly depressing, even though it is frequently engrossing and almost totally believable. It is written with an eye to faithfully reproducing the daily enervating details of farm life. The author in no way romanticizes the condition or character of the North Dakota farmer in the 1930's, nor does she feel that her statement is restricted to its North Dakota setting or to that time.

Jean Peyroutet, discussing Ms. Hudson's work in his thesis, "The Farm Novel as an Interpretation of North Dakota," claims that even though her novel deals with the Thirties that it is essentially a novel extolling "pioneer virtues" (Peyroutet, 1968). Lois Hudson's reply to that comment effectively refutes Peyroutet and supports the theme of her novel:

> It is a novel showing how totally irrelevant and obsolete those "virtues" had become by 1930. I doubt that they ever made anyone "successful" (that has been a myth of the capitalists), but by 1930, they were as useless as a wooden plow. That, precisely, was Custer's tragedy. He still believed in them. He'd been raised on Horatio Alger, and for all the cynicism he expressed, he still believed (Hudson, 1974a).

In spite of all his strength and effort, his careful husbandry, George is a loser. He is a failure as a farmer, as a husband, and

finally as a father. His failings evidently do not arise out of a complete lack of redeeming qualities however. It's true that George is a surly man, unpleasant and quick to lose his temper, but he is being destroyed both internally and externally by the circumstances of his life. He smolders inwardly with a violence that is felt by everyone near him.

> George's great frame alone was formidable, but the frame housed a violence of soul vastly more formidable than that of flesh. No room into which George stepped was free from tension until he left it again (Hudson, 1962, p. 31).

The angry vehemence that fills George is the product of his unsuccessful efforts to overcome the effects of the climate, the land, and especially the economic system. His father-in-law, Will Shepard is a "successful" farmer, and even though he is George's competitor both professionally and personally, he can excuse George's failings and indicates that George is due a certain amount of credit and respect.

> All these years he had blamed George for the hard life that Rachel was obliged to live; yet in good times George would have been a highly successful farmer. He was sensible about farming, and he worked as hard as any man Will had ever known. . . . He had been angry with George for insisting on repaying the loan; now he had to admit that he never could have respected a son-in-law who hadn't repaid him. He had been annoyed with George for refusing even to think about taking relief of some sort; now he had to admit that he never would have respected a son-in-law who went on relief (Hudson, 1962, p. 354).

Time and again George exerts great strength, energy and ingenuity; he works very hard "all day, every day." He is an innovative, intelligent farmer. He tried frequently to communicate with and understand his wife and daughter, but, nevertheless, in every realm of his life, each of his efforts fails.

The plot of The Bones of Plenty is not complex. Aside from the author's skill with description and narrative, one might wonder that it takes her well over 400 pages to recount the ultimate defeat of an obscure North Dakota tenant farmer. As the novel opens, the main character, George Custer experiences the first of a continuing pattern of losses. It ends with "his last stand," an auction at which he must sell everything and move off the rented farm he has worked for nine years. There is no relief from the pressures which finally defeat him; he experiences loss after loss until everything is gone.

In the first episode of the novel, George's mare unexpectedly falls into an old, dry, poorly-filled well shaft. George rescues the mare, but the accident causes her to abort her foal. George is compelled to thankfulness that he didn't lose the mare. George has, in this incident, not only lost the colt, but, as importantly, the hard-to-come by cash represented by the stud fee. This first episode sets the pattern for George's losses for the remainder of the novel. In fact, at the novel's end he loses the mare too. Characteristically, George blames this loss and the other losses that he experiences on nameless, but mortal enemies.

> Damn the son-of-a-bitch that would leave a hole like that. Didn't a man have enough trouble from enemies he already knew without being dealt a blow like this from some idiot whose name he would never even know? (Hudson, 1962, p. 9).

Typically, George does not blame this misfortune on an intangible being or on mere bad luck. He attributes his problem to some explainable, if unknown, factor. George is too fundamentally proud to admit that there is anything that is beyond his power to control, when, in fact, he controls nothing. His wife sees the hopelessness of their

situation, but she is unwilling or unable to penetrate his armor of pride to make him see.

Calamity after calamity strikes him, and he continues to pursue his livelihood, convinced to the end that if he will only endure, his modest life goals will be attained. He wants only to live according to what he understands are pioneer ideals--"inventiveness, courage, strength, skill with his land and his animals" (Hudson, 1962, p. 295). He believes that upon these ideals the American farm was made to prosper for the individual. Guided by such values, he thinks he cannot fail but be successful in eventually buying the farm he rents from his dime-store-owner landlord. But in spite of his "inventiveness, courage, strength, skill with his land and his animals," his years of labor are futile.

After his mare loses the foal, George loses his savings. The loss of his savings, like the loss of the colt, cannot be accounted for by any personal fault. The local banker pockets the bank's remaining assets and leaves town. As George relates this calamity to his wife, we see added to the pattern of material losses, that he is losing, has indeed already lost, meaningful contact with his wife.

> He couldn't believe it. Surely it must matter to her that they had lost two hundred dollars. Surely she was not going to let him bear the loss alone. Surely she would say something that would commit herself to him. She would express her fear over what would become of them, thus admitting that now they had no choice but to survive or fail together--admitting that she could not get along without him. . . . What was a wife for? Even if she would simply strike back at him with all the fury she must feel about everything (For she must feel it? She must!), as he had only now struck at her--even then it would be a kind of commitment. What was a wife for, if she let a man bear a thing like this alone?
>
> But though she worked beside him as hard as he worked, all day, every day, and submitted to him silently in the night, she was no longer committed to him (Hudson, 1962, p. 38).

The pattern of loss established early in the novel continues.

George is innovative; he has had remarkable success with a hybrid corn. Inspired partly by that success, he opts to try a new brand of seed wheat--Ceres. He fears, and justifiably, that the seed has not been properly treated to prevent smut. Nevertheless, he plows the land and dreams of increasing his profit and his prestige by planting Ceres.

> --the good Ceres that would not rust, that would harvest maybe twenty bushels to the acre. . . .
>
> Then the wheat was pouring out of the threshing machine. . . . He was driving it to the elevator where Adolph Beahr was unusually respectful. "By God, George! You was on the right track, after all!" . . . When the wheat checks were all in, his neighbors came to buy from him the seed they were now deriding him about (Hudson, 1962, p. 82).

In mid-August George decides to begin his wheat harvest. The sight of his own wheat in shocks thrills him; he is excited and anxious as he awaits the arrival of the threshers--the wheat has been "standing in shocks long enough." Destruction or damage from hail, rain and wind is an ever present possibility. His excitement is intense, he thinks he is finally close to winning a victory over the numberless enemies that the prairie farmer faces. He imagines that his work has won for him a magnificent triumph; he sees the work and the terrible sacrifices he's made all season about to be rewarded. He glories in his imagined success.

> He made up his mind not to wonder how much he'd get docked for the smut. In a few minutes now the crop that had required so much work and so much waiting would begin pouring out of the machine. Finally he had a little control. The crows he couldn't control had left some seed in the ground for him; the freak late-frost he couldn't control had not come; the grasshoppers had not cleaned out the fields, though they tried; the black clouds had not brought tornadoes or hail.
>
> Now at last there was a job he could do--a job to put all his strength into--a job that would quickly fill the truck, while he

> watched, with the results of all the work and the waiting (Hudson, 1962, p. 219).

The irony is incredibly strong. Here, as throughout the book, he is totally mistaken, both in his belief that he has any control over the forces that victimize him, and in his hope and expectation that his "inventiveness, courage, strength, skill with his land and his animals" would assure him success.

Ms. Hudson insists on being historically accurate in her work. The wheat incident is a good example of the author's ability to mesh historic fact with literary skill. Historian Elwyn Robinson writes in his History of North Dakota that:

> the introduction of an improved wheat . . . meant much. Ceres, the new wheat, was first distributed in 1925 . . . it gave good yields under drought and other severe conditions and so was a notable adaptation to the semiarid country. By 1934 it was planted on 45 per cent of the state's wheat acreage (Robinson, 1966, p. 373).

Even though history indicates that George's switch from Marquis to Ceres was a sound move, George is made to realize that he'd have been better off if he had planted Marquis. Even though he did produce a better bushel-per-acre yield from the Ceres, he was docked 8 cents a bushel for smut; the middleman elevator operator had not treated the Ceres seed properly to prevent the development of the smut (Hudson, 1962, p. 111).

> The smut was bad. . . . He had the feeling all along that Adolph lied to him about the seed. Now he was sure of it, but how could he prove that Adolph deliberately swindled him? (Hudson, 1962, p. 214).

Yet he continues to trust that his own strength and endurance will eventually free him from the burdens that he now faces.

The turkeys he fed with his hybrid corn "were the last hope for the harvest year" (Hudson, 1962, p. 297). He butchers his flock which yields nearly 800 pounds of dressed poultry. He has contracted to sell

to a New York firm hoping to get a better price than he had locally the previous year. He comes to realize, but still superficially, that he is at the mercy of the force--this time again represented by the middleman. At the end of the harvest George acknowledges that once again he is wronged: "the New York outfit had slickered him." Once again George is the victim of a situation over which he has no control (Hudson, 1962, p. 399). He'd received only 19 cents a pound; he'd been promised 30 cents.

Finally after tearing up his lease in a fit of pride and temper, George, with no other options left, must sell out and move off the farm that he has worked for nine years. Like his namesake, George is utterly defeated. He asks, "Where were the god-damned ENEMIES, anyway!" (Hudson, 1962, p. 420). But George has no answer for this question, just as he had no answer to his question "What was a wife for?" (Hudson, 1962, p. 38).

George's losses are not limited to the loss of the rented farm. Tightly interwoven into the pattern of failure is his relationship with his wife, Rachel, and with his daughter, Lucy.

Of Rachel, George protests, "Never would she commit herself to him--not even about the flavor of ice cream" (Hudson, 1962, p. 143). Here, as earlier, he complains of Rachel's apparent lack of commitment to him. He cannot perceive that ironically the violence of his pride, and his need to impress her, drive her further away.

Rachel cannot help but be offended and fearful of George's pride and violence. She often hears him threaten to kill or maim his enemies, but it is Lucy, their thin, frail seven-year-old daughter, that she sees George harm. Rachel wonders,

> How many times had he done it since that first time? Twenty? A hundred? Five? How was it that she had gone on living with a man who could turn into an insane wild beast? She couldn't believe it.
>
> She could never believe it when the man she had married became a beast (Hudson, 1962, p. 177).

George had beaten Lucy because, while she had been tending them, the cows had run away and trampled the wheat. The wheat crop was his primary hope for success at harvest time. George's frustration at everything that conspired against his need to produce in order that he and his family might survive, motivated the brutal release of his inner violence against Lucy. Malevolence is everywhere at work. The dog, acting under some unknowable impulse, chases the cows. Lucy is powerless to bring them under control; they trample the wheat; George beats both her and the dog. Rachel sees the end result of this series of unexplainable explosions and withdraws even further away from George.

George's futile little attempts to draw his family closer to him fail miserably. With Rachel, "He saw how it was--if he presented her with something she had asked for, then that gave him some claim on her" (Hudson, 1962, p. 143). His pride and the sense of inner strength, his resolve and half-restrained violence, ironically the very characteristics that first attracted Rachel to him, have now destroyed her love and respect for him.

With Lucy, George fails too and essentially for the same reason. He is the physical symbol of the force which assails them, and as such, he is hated and feared by his wife. And Lucy, at age seven, is already beginning to feel the same toward him. One episode, which follows the beating incident will be enough to convince. Both Lucy and George are at work in the potato patch. Lucy, contemplating the life forces she is

beginning to be aware of but cannot yet understand, wonders how "God had started." As she picks the potato bugs off the plants, she begins to comprehend how insects can hatch from eggs too small to be seen and can destroy the plants. She decides

> that God must have been a bug in the empty air--a very tiny bug that made Himself grow and grow and grow until He was big enough to fill part of the sky and to start making the rest of the world (Hudson, 1962, p. 212).

Pursuing this idea further, in her child's innocence, she suddenly thinks that she is "doing an unforgivable thing."

> Her father calls,
>
> "How many you got there?"
>
> She felt the deadly ice pierce through her and then she was embarrassed to have been overtaken and so violently surprised in her own silly feeling. She leaped obediently to her feet . . . and ran toward him with the pail.
>
> George had merely meant to be companionable when he called to her. . . .
>
> He had meant for her to call back something that might be friendly, or even jocular, so long as it was respectful--anything to complement the effort he had made to create in the potato patch the kind of cordial family cooperation that could refresh and inspire all those who worked together for survival. Now he felt trapped by the hopelessness of trying to be friends with her (Hudson, 1962, pp. 212-13).

The preceding passage spells out several ideas important to the novel. First it shows that Lucy fears more than respects George--"She felt the deadly ice pierce through her and then she was embarrassed." The lines point out quite vividly, by juxtaposing his words with Lucy's reaction to them, that George is the author's physical symbolization of the nameless governing force for those close to him. Lucy's meditations have been interrupted by her father. The description of her reaction indicates that, at least momentarily, she has mistaken her father's voice for that of God. The passage also defines George's character still

further. He is easily misunderstood; he craves respect and recognition. And finally the passage underscores yet another time that George is a failure.

Rachel's imperfect or reluctant perception of the force is most frequently expressed by her wonderings about the nature of things. She is the one character who has a college education, and she is envied because of it. Both George and her father, Will, had wanted such an opportunity. One would assume that because of her education, Rachel would have a rationalistic and humane approach to life's problems. But the conditions of her life keep her, like George, too busy scrabbling merely for survival. Her energies are so taxed that she has little strength and less inclination to search for answers to her questions. Occasionally she is compelled by the circumstances of her life to search for answers to the questions that insinuate themselves upon her, almost before she can defend herself against them. The force is responsible for Rachel's complete subjugation. She who ideally should, because of her training, be able to assume responsibility for making her own life choices is instead very sheep-like. She, who has always eschewed violence, is driven to the same violent behavior that alienated her from her husband. She who has a deep feeling of dependence on place is driven by her husband from all that she knows best.

George's telling her that the banker has taken their savings creates the first series of questionings for her. She finds herself wondering, "Why, then, did it matter whether a batch of bread ever pleased him again or not?" Rachel is unaware of her own capacity for such a question,

> She came upon the question the way she occasionally came upon a serpent as she was starting the garden in the cold spring. . . . And even while she was trying to calm the ridiculous physical reaction she always had when this happened, she was saying to herself, "But I was looking at it all the time! I saw it right there, all the while it was so still!"
>
> So it was with the question. Now that she had seen it, she knew how long it had been there, and she knew that, unlike the snake, it would never go away and let her calm herself again (Hudson, 1962, p. 40).

Throughout the book the effects of the force consistently set her to wondering. She wonders how she could happen to have loved George; why her love for him had ended. She wonders how many times George will beat Lucy again; how it was "that she had gone on living with a man who could turn into an insane wild beast?" The questions are constant and ever present.

> What was there to do? End her marriage? . . . [Had] the beast [always been inside the father of her children?] . . . Was the beast in him the day he led the three-thousand-pound bull away from the schoolyard? Did a man have to have a beast in him to deal with such a beast? . . . If it had not been in him then, where had it come from since, and why had it come? What was there to do? What was there to do? . . . What was there to do? (Hudson, 1962, p. 177-78).

She seems powerless to understand. At the beginning of the novel Rachel is a gentle woman in whom any violence or anger would have been unbelievable. As the novel progresses, we see her search for questions, then we see her begin to look somewhere outside of her usual experiences in an attempt to overcome the unhappiness that is inflicted on them all. Knowing Lucy wants a rabbit, she tries to win one on a punch board.

> Something would guide her fingers and make her put that key in the right hole. For once an accident of time would be good--it would be time for the pink rabbit to be won (Hudson, 1962, p. 118).

Instead of winning the rabbit, Rachel has lost a nickel; she could have bought Lucy a tiny bit of candy with that money.

Little by little Rachel's bitterness begins to surface. After having taken lunch out to the men in the fields, she walks away, openly admitting to herself her hatred.

> Rachel walked away from the little man--violated and despoiled by his rutting eyes. How she despised males. If George could have known what that man had said, he might have killed him. And then he probably would have taken on the Swede, too. But not for her sake. It would have been for his own honor that George would have bloodied the stubble with a filthy little stray that dared to insult his wife. She had never ceased to be amazed at the grossness of most men. To think of cooking for such debauched animals--of politely waiting on them for another day and a half!

Then, in the very next scene, Rachel becomes, for her, almost as brutally violent as George has ever been, and she acts out of a similar motivation--she is over-worked, desperate.

> The half-grown cats that had taken to sleeping under the porch in the hot weather were up on the kitchen table. Their tails stuck straight up with pleasure, as if they were still kittens drinking warm cow's milk from an old saucer. They were rapturously licking neat trails across the gleaming meringue on the pies.
>
> Rachel seized a tail in either hand, walked out on the porch, swung her hands as far behind her as they would go, swung forward again with all the momentum the backward swing had given her, and let go of the cats. She stood on the porch, watching them go, feeling still in her fists the narrowing vertebrae of their tails under the soft long hair and the thin warm skin, seeing still the way the tails had pointed in the air over the kitchen table as the cats ruined her pies.
>
> I must be losing my mind, she thought. I must be losing my mind.
>
> She went back into the kitchen and looked at the pies. Ruined utterly. What would she feed those lustful, gluttonous men? She looked at the clock. There was simply not time to make another desert [sic]. Swede would probably stamp on the floor if he didn't get pies. What they didn't know wouldn't hurt any of them, including George. She skimmed the rest of the meringue off and tossed it in the slop pail (Hudson, 1962, pp. 235-36).

Relying probably on her school training, she tries to analyze her situation, but only raises further bewilderment and frustration.

> She had never done a violent thing in her life--never come close to hurting an animal. And she had never lied, either, and now she was lying--covering polluted pies so nobody would ever know (Hudson, 1962, pp. 235-36).

She sees herself as "Always caught in the center." Her line of inquiry usually leaves her nowhere, "one must believe that either everything or nothing had a rational purpose" (Hudson, 1962, p. 117). "I'm thirty-two years old and I'm an old woman because I can't understand anything about the world any more" (Hudson, 1962, p. 231).

Names are important to the novel's characterizations. Rachel is a Hebrew name; it means ewe (Harper's, 1961). As evidence that the name is intended to add to the characterization, Will, Rachel's father, says of her, "Rachel, ewe, his Rachel with a lamb now" (Hudson, 1962, p. 356). It is typical of the pervading irony of the work that the one educated person in the novel would be characterized as a ewe. And Rachel is most often sheep-like. In spite of all her best reasoning, she married George, primarily out of an instinct. At the novel's end, even though she has lost respect for him and no longer loves him, she follows him away from their home. In spite of all that her reason tells her, she allows her home to be broken up, sees her neighbors carry away her possessions, and prepares to leave the only home she's known. She has allowed George's pride to keep them from accepting any help from her family. And, because George, in a fit of frustration, tears up the lease agreement, they must move from the rented farm. Near the end of the novel Rachel feels the indisputable presence of an external power.

> The cold gust that blasted into the house was like a personal attack from the universe . . . Rachel felt the attack and the strange sentience of the cold. It was as though the cold was feeling <u>her</u>, as much as she was feeling <u>it</u>. There was just too much to fight. How could anybody fight it all? "What shall we do?" she cried (Hudson, 1962, p. 361).

At this point, as if to emphasize the pervading defeatism of the novel, Rachel loses her father; he dies of cancer, after having suffered through three painful operations.

Like the other central female characters in the novel, Lucy also reacts with questions to the pressures that surround them. A child quite naturally questions the circumstances of his life, and, traditionally, the child looks to the adult for answers. In a novel composed almost exclusively of examples of human suffering, Lucy's pain is particularly heart breaking, first of course, because she is a child, and secondly, as a child, she has few defenses. Her father, no doubt because he is entirely under the power of the malevolence, wishes openly that she were a boy. A farmer with two daughters, and no prospects for a son, is undoubtedly handicapped in an agricultural society. He needs the physical strength that sons would provide him, and, in the agrarian tradition, he needs a son to inherit the farm. Of course George does not and never will own his farm, but he still makes Lucy feel the pain of his dissatisfaction with her because of her sex. This irrational attitude toward her is perceived by Lucy as basically a mistake or a bit of wrong doing on her part. She is reacting to the pressure of this disapproval from her first appearance in the novel. George says to her:

> "When I was your age I could have walked home from town in less than an hour."
>
> "So can I!" Lucy cried. "I'll do it tonight! I can walk just as fast as any boy."
>
> It tickled him to be able to get her goat so easily, but he was irritated too, because she had no business using that tone of voice to him.
>
> "Just watch yourself," he said coldly.
>
> She bent her head so he couldn't see her face. . . . Her cheeks were scarlet. She had a Custer temper all right. . . .
>
> She jumped out and ran with a straight, easy stride toward the building. She had the best body and the strongest run of any child he could see in the yard. What a waste it was that she hadn't been born a boy! (Hudson, 1962, p. 64).

On her way home from school, Lucy is still tormented by her father's dissatisfaction.

> All day long she had not got over being mad at her father, either, and she had hunched over her papers so Douglas Sinclair couldn't copy from her. If boys were so much smarter than girls, why did any boy she had ever sat behind always want to copy her papers? If only she dared ask her father that question! And she could chin herself more times than Douglas could, or than either of the other two boys in her grade. She had told her father that, and he had said that was because the boys lived in town and weren't like farm boys he had in mind. But he would see, now, how much faster she could walk home than Douglas Sinclair ever could (Hudson, 1962, p. 69).

Nearly every Lucy episode of the novel is filled with her strivings to redeem herself against the authority (tradition, her father) that says "it was an intolerable joke to be female" (Hudson, 1962, p. 140).

Because she is a child, Lucy finds many more opportunities to question the problems of human existence, and, in the tradition in which she lives, many of the questions she asks are verboten. Sex, a perpetual source of mystery to humanity, is shushed. Lucy's innocence adds a small measure of comic relief to the book:

> she had to walk slowly and make as little noise as she could, for fear of Mr. Greeder's mean bull. . . . It was not polite to say the word bull, or even to think it. In fact, it was practically a sin (Hudson, 1962, p. 69).

And, much later, as they leave her uncle's wedding ceremony, Lucy's questions make her mother blush.

> They could see the signs all over the honeymoon car as soon as they walked out on the porch. . . . Lucy was already down at the road reading them, and she was waiting to ask about some of them. They said, "Bismarck or Bust," "Just Married," "Whoopee!" "Watch Our Dust," and "Hot Springs Tonight!"
>
> "What does that one mean, Momma?" she asked.
>
> "Why, I don't know, dear," Rachel said. "Maybe whoever painted it thought they were going to go to Hot Springs."
>
> George looked at the sign and at Rachel and began to laugh.
>
> Lucy said, "But it says Bismarck too, so whoever did it must know they're going to Bismarck."
>
> George laughed some more and Rachel felt the blood in her face.

"Well, what does it mean?" Lucy asked again. "I just want to know."

"Nothing!" Rachel said (Hudson, 1962, p. 389).

Humor aside, from the deeply felt dissatisfaction of her father over her sexual identity, to the healthy sex questions of youth, the mysteries of sex are perplexing to Lucy. In the Freudian sense, sex is an influential motivation. Lucy's occasional contemplation of sexuality is associated with her being victimized by the combined forces of the book. Not only does she suffer because of her sexual identity, but she is victimized in other ways. It is frequently mentioned in the book that Lucy is very much like her father. Her mother and grandparents worry almost incessantly over what will become of a girl who is so much like George Custer.

After the beating Rachel says,

> But this child was already so proud. . . . And now this child was still like him, so much more than he knew. Now she was proud and there was never anything to say that did not make things harder (Hudson, 1962, pp. 177-78).

Rose, her grandmother thinks,

> It seemed to Rose as though she herself was the only one in the family who cared whether or not Lucy grew up to be a lady. . . . What would become of the child? After all, she was a girl. Every day she walked more like George, with long, unfeminine strides (Hudson, 1962, pp. 122, 130).

Will, her grandfather,

> believed she had the intellect to win a scholarship some day, but by the time that day came, the stubborn, defiant streak she had inherited from George might well have so alienated her teachers that her record would in no way reflect her capabilities (Hudson, 1962, p. 104).

George both disdains and revels in the similarity between himself and Lucy. He admonishes her for adopting a bold tone of voice, probably an echo of his own tone, but he admires her strength and ease in running.

Here and elsewhere in the novel George comments on her physical abilities.

> Above all he hoped that Lucy would follow in his footsteps--it was hard for a man like him not to have a boy, but Lucy could beat the boys at most things anyhow. He had watched her shinnying up her swing rope, chinning herself on the bar he had put up for her between two trees, running easily, as he did himself, across a half a mile of pasture. Like him, if she got up enough momentum she could jump a remarkable distance; he had seen her go over a seven-foot puddle with inches to spare. Like him she was physically fearless. . . . If she were only a boy, what a magnificent athlete he could make of her (Hudson, 1962, pp. 94-5).

Also like him, however, Lucy is a loser and is completely at the mercy of the capriciousness of an invisible power. The incident with the cows that has already been described is the most convincing example of Lucy's victimization. After a brutalizing, frightening day in the sun with the cows, after suffering the discomfort and isolation of the empty, sun-filled pasture, the dog unaccountably startles the cows into a run, and, because she is powerless to stop them, they trample the wheat. She is beaten "and kicked . . . away like a loathsome thing" by her father, but not before she has dared to defy him.

> "Get the razor strop!"
> "No! It wasn't my fault!"
> "I'll <u>teach</u> you to talk back to me!" (Hudson, 1962, p. 175).

And at the Mayday festivities the circumstances conspire to keep her not only from enjoying herself, but from winning the race as she'd hoped to:

> It seemed to her that she spent the whole day hiding, instead of seeing the things she had come to see, and she was standing behind a wagon when they called for the six-to-eight-year-old race. She had to run so far and so fast to get to the starting line that she was too tired to do her best. There were only seven entrants with the whole width of the course to run in, and she realized, at the last minute, that she had run in a long diagonal. She came in third.
> "Why didn't you run in a straight line? A straight line?"
> "I don't know," she said (Hudson, 1962, p. 96).

Lucy reacts to the constantly felt disapproval of her father by pushing herself harder and harder, and by subjecting herself to frightening tests:

> she stood up in the swing and began to pump. . . . Higher and higher she went, until the long swing ropes stretched out almost parallel to the ground and she stiffened her body to keep from flying out at the forward end of the arc. Then the rope would snap with a dangerous jolt and she would begin the descent. . . . At the other end of the arc she would be suspended for an instant, nearly horizontal, unable to breathe, looking down, like a bird, with just time to wonder before she started down again, if this was the moment she finally was going to fall. . . . There had to be the awful jerky moments at either end of the arc before she could begin the prayer. One had to be very brave to bear the sight of those ropes buckling and rippling with indecision. Every day she proved to God that she was worthy of being changed into a boy (Hudson, 1962, p. 131).

It should be recalled here that at an earlier point, she equated her father's call with the voice of God.

There is one final episode that clinches the idea that the force dominates and victimizes the characters in the novel and Lucy as much as, maybe more than, anyone else. After a dust storm, the account of which leaves the reader feeling the grit in his teeth, Lucy is confined indoors because of the weather. She is playing with a ball. Her mother has reprimanded her once because, as any parent knows, a bouncing ball indoors often causes damage. Lucy is bored with the ball, but because she had argued to be allowed to play with it, she feels compelled to continue to bounce it. Suddenly it gets away from her, "she ran after it, to recapture it quickly and show that she really was in control of it." But before Lucy can catch it, the ball "rose into the air as though it was possessed" (Hudson, 1962, p. 403). It breaks the kitchen window. Another aspect of the same inexplicable force that conspired to frighten the cows has now been responsible for Lucy's breaking the

window. Lucy, a girl too much like her father, is also the victim of a capricious fate. Perhaps in their often remarked upon pride, they offend the sovereign spirits and thus call down upon their own heads the ancient punishments. One can understand why the arrogant George is made to suffer, but it is indeed frightening that an innocent little girl should be harassed so.

Rose, Lucy's grandmother, like Rachel is dominated by questions concerning her life. The questions that each character asks are important. Each one shows the reader something about its asker, and the combined questions of everyone add up to an expression of utter loss of control, utter failure of all man's efforts and institutions. Man does not often question his fate, his position in life, when he is strong and prosperous. Unlike Job, the ordinary person questions only the presence of adversity, injustice or evil; rarely does he ask whether or not he deserves beneficence.

Rose does not play a prominent role in the plot, but her part is important to the over-all literary theme. Unlike the other characters so far described, Rose makes a definition and refers specifically to "a predestined force. . . . a force far stronger than mortals which intervened between them and their consciences, and that force was Satan" (Hudson, 1962, pp. 124-25). But though she identifies and names it, she has no more real understanding of why they are all subjected to its authority than does any one of the other characters. She too reacts to this influence with questions. She wonders why she is still plagued with thoughts of the flesh, with ungratefulness for God's gifts. Even

after many years of steely self-containment, she finds her mind occupied with hateful thoughts.

> And should a woman who has been married for thirty-six years, Rose Shepard, be still remembering a dead father's cruelty--and, far worse, should she be remembering him as if she had not forgiven him long ago? Should there be any hatred in a Christian woman who has had fifty-four years to learn to follow Christ? (Hudson, 1962, pp. 123-24).

She chides herself unmercifully for what would be a common human reaction to cleaning a chicken house.

> You've had fifty-four years to learn how to clean a chicken house without dirtying your mind as much as your rubbers, and still you can't do it. Just think of what you've been thinking in there. How much you hate chickens. How much you hate to wash eggs. How much you hate to butcher chickens and smell the filthy brown of their warm intestines in your hand. . . . You may well ask, Rose Stuart, what ails you when you let your mind be filled all morning with complaints and vicious thoughts. You should thank God for every egg you wash and every chicken you eat. . . . You should be on your knees before God right here in this stinking manure, thanking Him (Hudson, 1962, pp. 123-24).

Her religion has taught her to emphasize self-restraint and self-denial rather than to express love or self-love. Rose sees mankind, herself included, consumed with uncontrollable impulses. Forbidden words, thoughts, emotions keep squeezing past her defenses to make themselves known to her. Rose has made a continuous effort to suppress all emotion, to deny herself all comfort or pleasure. She had been beautiful in her youth; at fifty-four she is "thin from the erosions of her austerity, which sought to conquer all hungers. . . . she had devoted much of her life to the mortification of the flesh" (Hudson, 1962, p. 22).

Rose believes unremittingly in the work ethic. As she cleans the chicken house she reminds herself that she had "always been able to work" and asks "Can I not ever, ever learn to be grateful?" (Hudson, 1962, p. 124). When Will comes home from the hospital, Rose only begins

to be at ease when she can be occupied with some task.

> "What can I get you for dinner?" she asked.
> "Almost anything liquid," he said tiredly. . . .
> Then it occurred to him that she wanted very much to do something hard and complicated for him. . . . All he really wanted was to have her sit beside him and talk. . . .
> Rose's face took on a purposeful look and lost some of its fear. The worst fear of her life was to find herself unable to do something useful (Hudson, 1962, p. 341).

Work is Rose's escape, her hoped for redemption, but, ironically, it is the reason for her failure. Rachel suggests that Rose had been too busy to pay attention to Stuart when he was growing up. And even after Stuart has come home from a two-year disappearance, she still uses work as an escape, as a means of keeping him at a distance.

As she mourns over Will's death she sees herself clearly. For the first time she acknowledges that her self-containment and commitment to work has been a vain, wasteful escape from life.

> He had always been so much more generous with her than she had been with him. She knew that he had lived his life without some of the things a man ought to have with his wife. But she couldn't see how she herself could ever have been any different. For thirty-six years she had known well enough what she did. She had held him away from herself and tried to make up for it by working too hard. He had seen what she was doing--he always saw--and she had pushed him farther away because she was afraid to have him see.
> I never wanted him to know what was in my mind. But I loved him. But if he knew what was in my mind, I wanted to run away. I never wanted anybody to know what was in my mind. . . . But I hide what is in my mind even from God. . . . But I loved him. . . . Did I ever say it to him? I can't remember, I can't remember--stop, God, stop trying to find out if I said it--I won't let it be in my mind and then You won't know--nobody will ever know (Hudson, 1962, pp. 375-76).

Rose, as befits the name, had been beautiful when she was a young woman (Hudson, 1962, p. 22). Rose, traditionally the symbol of love and passion, is an irony when it is associated with the harsh, inflexible Rose Stuart Shepard. Rose, who consistently refused to

acknowledge her love for her husband and who cannot understand or forgive her son for his drinking, is no doubt the inheritor of a set of painful preconceptions and recollections of married life. Early in the novel she asks herself:

> Should you not be thankful, every minute of your life, that you have not had to live the life of your mother and to bear eleven children in a sod hut to a man who would not control either his wicked temper or his evil desires? (Hudson, 1962, p. 123).

Rose, scarred by frightful childhood experiences is evidently responding to life now as if it were life then. In her defensiveness she fails to overcome the influences of childhood and suffers needlessly throughout her adult life.

Her neurotic hangovers from childhood have no doubt been responsible for much of Rachel's lack of responsiveness to George. Several times Rachel repeats what her mother has said. An example of Rose's influence on Rachel is, "'Males,' her mother would say. 'They don't care <u>what</u> they do most of them'" (Hudson, 1962, p. 233). Later Rachel's thoughts reflect the sense of Rose's own sentiment. "Males! God save the world from males! How could that man come in here and confess that his own hideous lust had procreated <u>another</u> tragic child to grow up motherless?" (Hudson, 1962, p. 309).

Lucy has also begun to feel the pressure of the tradition of taboos. "Lucy had begun to wonder, lately, how a person was supposed to keep impolite or even terrible words out of her head" (Hudson, 1962, p. 69). Lucy's thought means much the same thing as Rose's "I won't let it be in my mind" (Hudson, 1962, p. 376).

It seems that Rose's position as eldest member of three generations is an influential one, and, unfortunately the strength of the

tradition which she represents is harmful to those who come later. Her ideas on sexuality tie in closely with her religious fundamentalism. The combined effects of Rose's fundamentalist personality, her clinging to "the word" when everything else has been lost, symbolizes the failure of tradition and religion.

George is not alone in recognizing the irony of the idea of thanking God for what they do not have. George says he hates Rachel's family because they

> just happened to get born at the right time. They got in when the getting was good and now they try to tell me it wasn't luck--it was their hard work and their God-damned religion.

Rose's only son, Stuart, also sees the problems that religion has not solved and he is puzzled and put off at his mother's continual piety.

> The old man was going to die, wasn't he? Soon. And yet, by God, there was the old lady praying to some God-damn God morning, noon, and night. Before every meal, praying "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done," [intentional irony?] all the while her husband [Will] was up there in Bismarck being a guinea pig for some small-town quack. It was all a man could do to eat a meal after his mother got through with her praying (Hudson, 1962, p. 330).

Simplistically, each one of the characters already described represents the failure not only of an individual in a hostile world, but also the failure of an institution. On a personal level, the two marriages--Rachel and George, Will and Rose--represent the failure of love, along with individual failure in achieving one's life goals. On a more abstract plane, the failure of the free enterprise system to provide for the individual "small guy" is represented by George's losing the rented farm after nine years of hard labor. Rachel's position suggests the failings and the unrealized goals of our educational system. Lucy is the victim of continued assaults on her identity and represents at least

the blighting of future hopes. Rose, as mentioned, represents the failure of tradition and religion to comfort and satisfy the changing needs of man.

Stuart, the Shepards' only son, has a small part in this story but he too stands for an entire mode of thought. Stuart, unlike George and Rachel, seems to have always been aware that something beyond human understanding governed all. Unlike Rose and Will, however, he cannot identify it, and therefore he has no relief from the pressure it exerts upon him. As each character symbolizes an idea that is much larger than the individual that represents it, Stuart embodies another of man's inept attempts to triumph over his environment.

No one in his family can understand Stuart; they puzzle endlessly over him. Rachel recalls his boyhood escapades:

> "I declare," her mother would say, "what ails the child! Here I thought he was out with Will all afternoon! And Will thought he was with me in the chicken house. And just when we were sure he was lost, and we were going to look for him, out he came, making that outlandish noise. He scared us half to death. It's the third time. Whatever makes him do it!"
>
> What did make him do it? He seemed to have a need to do shocking things, even though he was always so shy. Did he crave attention so much. . . . Was that how it had been with Stuart? Had his mother been too busy? (WORK!) . . . her mother would only say, "What makes him do these things?" (Hudson, 1962, pp. 228-29).

Will, Stuart's father, is more philosophical in his questioning. He looks to himself for an explanation of Stuart's actions. Reflecting on an abandoned black lamb, he remembers a bible story, which in turn reminds him of Stuart and himself. One of his ewes has abandoned her lamb, refusing to allow it to feed. If Will didn't feed it, it would simply starve to death.

> Will could never understand such an apparent distortion of the maternal instinct. What other instinct was stronger? He'd always

> wondered the same thing about those human twins born to Isaac, that other keeper of flocks. Why had the mother loved Jacob and not Esau? In the case of the ewe who pushed away one twin, did she choose between them for such obscure and female reasons as caused Rebekah to choose between Jacob and Esau? Or was there some practical instinct working--did the ewe know that she had only enough milk to raise one lamb, and did her instinct force her to push away the weaker one, even while her mother's heart bled that the world must be so?
>
> When he thought of Jacob and Esau, Will thought of Rachel and Stuart. It was impossible to believe that he had not loved them equally. Surely, surely, he had loved them equally. Why then, had one of them run away, bitterly renouncing his birthright? Esau had at least cried out to his blind father. (Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father!) But never once had Stuart spoken of the things that troubled him. He had simply run away, leaving his father to wonder, for two tortured years, what terrible blindness of his own had driven his son away from him (Hudson, 1962, p. 105).

George is unfeeling or simply scornful of Stuart.

> He's a grown man! I've said to you a thousand times before--if a man wants to drink himself to death, no power on earth is going to stop him (Hudson, 1962, p. 234).

Rose, again rather simplistically, explains that the

> predestined force . . . had overtaken Stuart, when he had gone on a lark with some other boys and they had got hold of some bootleg liquor (Hudson, 1962, pp. 124-25).

Stuart's own reaction to his life is to escape. As the novel opens, Stuart has been gone for two years. He comes home almost by chance with the threshing crew. His coming is presaged with a nice piece of dramatic irony. A thresherman who turns out to be Stuart is described to Rachel, but she is not at all reminded of her brother.

> There was one man who was no more than a boy, really, could drink even the Swede under the table on a Saturday night and then go on a binge that would have finished off most of his elders. He had never been known to turn down the vilest brew and it was only a question of time till he would get hold of something that would kill him on the spot--not that it would matter at all to him, the way he carried on (Hudson, 1962, p. 216).

This same thresherman was supposed to come with the crew to do George's harvest. He doesn't appear until noon. The foreman tells George, "the fellow . . . had gone on a bender" (Hudson, 1962, p. 223). When he does appear, Stuart is very sick with a hangover.

There are several indications throughout the book that Stuart's problems are the typically circular ones which plague man. Rose has probably neglected Stuart's spiritual/emotional development by endeavoring somehow to justify her existence by working constantly and by consistently denying herself any emotional expression. She, who is indirectly responsible for Stuart's failings, has influenced Rachel to react negatively toward him.

Stuart, with his disappearing acts, had sought many times to penetrate what he fears is his family's indifference toward him. He does not understand that their behavior, their values and attitudes are dictated to them by something greater than themselves. As he grows older, his attention-getting tactics become more drastic and self-destructive. His behavior, intended to draw some visible sign of recognition and acceptance from his family only succeeds in further alienating him from them. Rachel's recollections show how his attempts to call their attention to him fail.

> That first time he had got drunk in high school she and her mother both felt as though he had died. He was permanently separated from them by their own incredulity. They could not believe it had happened. "Wherever did he get the taste for it?" they asked each other. "Where did he get hold of it? How can he do it? What <u>makes</u> him do it?" (Hudson, 1962, p. 232).

It is another irony that as he reaches out for understanding from <u>the</u> two important women in his life, his actions repel them. It's doubly

ironic that in spite of their professions of Christian beliefs, they cannot forgive Stuart. "He was permanently separated from them . . ."

The fact of his alienation from Rose and Rachel is only too apparent; Stuart is forced to react as though he is indifferent.

> He waited to see a hint of comprehension in her face, but there was none. She would never understand why a prodigal son might need a little alcohol to get him back through the Old Man's door. Not to mention the Old Lady's.
>
> "You ought to try to eat," his sister said.
>
> "A little water will do it." He drank another cup and turned back toward the threshing machine.
>
> "Stuart! You'll go home tonight won't you?"
>
> "Maybe," he said.
>
> "What shall I tell them?"
>
> "Anything at all, just like you always did," he said (Hudson, 1962, p. 235).

Even after hearing the above remarks, Rachel must leave Stuart and hurry back to the house. She cannot afford to spend time in conversing--she has <u>work</u> to do. The food must be readied for the threshers. She cannot stop to understand or give support to her brother. She too is caught up in predetermined conditions over which she has no control. The evidence that Stuart's problems are attributable to his subjugation to an all-powerful force is indicated by the questions of Rose and Rachel, "wherever did he get a taste for it? . . . How can he do it? What <u>makes</u> him do it?"

Stuart is subject to the unseen but felt influence as much as any other character, but unlike the others so far described and like his father, Stuart is introspective. He examines the conditions imposed both internally and externally upon him. This propensity of his is displayed quite often considering the rather minor part he plays in the novel. Lying down for the night in his brother-in-law's field, he discloses some information about himself:

> He either stayed or moved on, depending on what shape he was in when the feeling came. It was always the same feeling: He was alone among people he knew. The only relief, outside of liquor, was to hurry someplace else, so he would only be alone among people he didn't know. For two years he had told himself that this feeling would go away when he was home again. It was silly to ask himself why he had not come home before, if he really believed that. It was sillier still to wonder how two years had gone so quickly. It was silliest of all to pretend, like a baby, that he didn't know how ridiculous he was (Hudson, 1962, p. 238).

Much of Stuart's trouble comes from the inappropriate way his family responds to him. When they pay any attention at all to him, it is to chide him, or to baby him. When he finally returns home after a two year absence, his mother's first remark to him is "You're drunk!" (Hudson, 1962, p. 240). It is established that Stuart is going to stay home because of his father's illness, and will be in charge of the farm. His father advises him to sell the horse because he's afraid Stuart cannot handle him. He suggests that Stuart get the truck brakes fixed, and he nags him to stay away from the booze because drinking offends Rose. His father urges him to go to college so that he can "find himself." While Will is in the hospital, both he and Rose agree that "they mustn't leave Stuart alone too long." And Rose leaves Will to return home just one day after Will's first cancer operation. Rachel does not trust him to go to town to a County Extension meeting. She consciously manipulates George into going too so that Stuart can't slip away by himself. George thinks Stuart should be taught some manners (that is a nice irony). "This [Stuart] was what came of spoiling them when they were little" (Hudson, 1962, p. 280).

Stuart resents their attitudes and responds with anger and anxiety. He finds himself in the same situation at home as it had been when

he was a boy. No one seems to recognize that he is now a man. He asks himself:

> How was it that no matter where he was, he always felt like somebody had hold of him by the hind leg? If it wasn't his mother, it was his brother-in-law. If it wasn't a damned schoolteacher, it was a doomed father. If it wasn't a car with a board for a window, it was a circle of grinning people and a mad waitress. If it wasn't a field with a fence around it, it was a field without a fence around it . . . (Hudson, 1962, p. 334).

Finally after his father's death, we see the unmistakable evidence of the development of what can be called nihilism in Stuart's personality. Stuart, outraged at his mother's futile, pitiless piety, at his father's pain and death shows up drunk at the grave site. At the funeral, he allows his pent up rage and bewilderment to explode.

> "They had to dynamite it!" Stuart shouted. "He worked his whole life in the damned dirt, and then it wouldn't even let him in! They had to dynamite it! Took twenty sticks to make him a little hole in the ground! It wouldn't even let him in!" (Hudson, 1962, p. 372).

He is horrified at the final irony of his father's life. Stuart is the only one who perceives this irony. He is also the only one who seems to know his father well enough to know that Will would not have liked the flowers left to freeze on his grave. Will loved living things, and always took pains to help things grow. Stuart asks, "What makes you think he'd want all those flowers out there just to freeze?" The preacher answers, "We always do it" (Hudson, 1962, p. 375). George's response is to knock Stuart unconscious.

At this point Stuart once again gives himself over to an acceptance of whatever comes. He finds himself obliged to marry Annie Finley, a bar maid. He accepts this fact with resignation. He also seems able to ignore or withstand his mother's furious disapproval. Apparently it matters very little to him what happens henceforth,

> . . . whenever he tried to see himself doing anything in the future, he felt a queer numb blankness in his head (Hudson, 1962, p. 383).

He goes on to wonder about the established values of others and dismisses them as meaningless for him. This final statement by Stuart is the expression of complete disillusionment and loss of faith in the future.

> From the time he could remember, people had said he didn't have any ambition. He'd never been mad when they said that--only when they hinted that he was lazy along with it. There was a difference between having no ambition and being lazy. He'd never been lazy; he liked to work. He just didn't like to work in order to get a perfect score on an examination. Nobody had ever proved to him that it made any difference whether he got a perfect score or not.
>
> Sometimes people told him he didn't have any self-respect. He'd never been able to figure out what self-respect was. Did it mean being willing to fight a bum who called you a bum. Did it mean sweating all day and worrying all night to try to get hold of some land you could call yours? Did it mean being able to see yourself somewhere in that blank sky in your head that people called the future?
>
> If it meant doing something you said you'd do, then he at least tried to have self-respect. If there was something in the future he knew he had to do, he didn't try to imagine it; he just tried to keep himself from running away.
>
> It was only the time at hand--the solitary present--that was unendurable. Like this time right now. . . . He knew that if he could get past Gebhardt's for the next few days, he would find himself doing what he'd said he'd do--standing beside Annie Finley and promising Reverend Brant that he would join his whole empty future with hers. And what difference would it make? It was just the present that he couldn't get through (Hudson, 1962, pp. 383-84).

While the other characters all symbolically represent the failure of an institution, both Stuart and Will represent man's attempts at a reconciliation with the source of ultimate power. Stuart and Will, although both are victimized, both represent philosophical attempts at solutions, comforts, or explanations for man. Stuart expresses a kind of nihilism. Will is a kind of modern stoic, but his philosophy is less negative than Stuart's. The following quote is typical of Will's consistent outlook:

> That morning I put the hay in--then I saw only as far as those clouds--the half-inch of water that might have fallen from them, the hay grown in a few mortal weeks on a tiny piece of a tiny particle of space, the few mortal days of my own that I coveted as though they were mine alone and not a part of all those laws around me. Now I see that rain, that field, those bits of time--I see them from the other side of the clouds. There was that moment in the hot rain when I was so foolish as to believe that God ought to save me from the laws. But now I can see things in a longer light, from the other side of the clouds (Hudson, 1962, p. 206).

The author's frequent use of Biblical quotes and allusions is most closely associated with the character of Will. He is the one character who can quote Bible verses verbatim. The other characters, although they are often reminded of their Bible training, merely remember the gist of their Bible verses or paraphrase them. His characterization and philosophy remind one of the philosophy expressed by the unknown authors of the Books of Job and Ecclesiastes. As pointed out in the first pages of this paper, both books discuss the problem of inexplicable human suffering. In the Book of Job the question of divine justice

> is raised inevitably by any and every instance of seemingly unmerited or purposeless suffering, and especially the suffering of a righteous man. Job's case, whether real or imaginary, poses the problem in the most striking possible way. A man of exemplary rectitude and piety is suddenly overwhelmed with disasters and loathsome disease (Pope, 1965, p. LXVIII).

With one notable difference (Will is not restored to his original prosperity), the parallel to Job is particularly appropriate to the character of Will. Although he is without a formal education, a fact he laments, he would be the only character capable of understanding, could perhaps even articulate the following phrase. In fact, the phrase is not unlike what the author represents as Will's train of thought:

> The one final reality appears to be the process by which things come into being, exist, and pass away. This ultimate Force, the Source

> and End of all things is inexorable. Against it there is no defense (Pope, 1965, p. LLXXVII).

Will is the most insightful and explicit speaker in terms of the super-power.

> Rain, sickness, mold, time--these things all had their laws, some of which he understood and some which he did not. Sometimes the laws worked together usefully, from a man's point of view, and sometimes they did not. Sometimes rain and mold and time made compost just as he wanted them to. Sometimes, if a man had been unlucky or foolish, they made spoiled hay. Decay, sickness, death--sometimes, from a man's point of view, they were good--sometimes bad. A man's life was totally dependent upon the same microscopic events that would eventually destroy his life and return him to dust. Sometimes it appeared that he had more choice, or at least more leeway, in his manipulations of the laws than he had at other times. Sometimes he felt forced to confront the laws with his own needs and risk himself to his own ignorant impertinence (Hudson, 1962, p. 195).

Will's story, the sub-plot of the novel, in many ways combines the ideas that inspired the ancient Greek tragedies and the exposition of the inexorable force of Biblical Wisdom literature. He has fallen from a high place (relatively speaking), been humbled, subjected to disease and finally to a painful death. He had been a prosperous farmer, hoping to pass on the benefits of his successful labor to his children. But unlike many famous tragedies, his suffering redeems no one nor anything. And, unlike Job, nothing is restored to Will. Although he is worthy of admiration, retains his dignity and integrity to his death, he is still destroyed. All is despair. Even though he had more understanding than anyone else, he has had no control over that which governs human life.

> Will was awakened the next morning so he could be put back to sleep again. He was dizzily aware of being lifted from his bed to a wagon, of the wall of white-shrouded masked people around him, of Rose momentarily in their midst, of a supine levitation in an elevator, of the white people lifting him again, of the narrow cold slab, of the jolly sounds of Dr. Murdoch. He wanted to tell Murdoch just to forget it all--that he understood the laws, that he knew it was

> too late. But the black rubber mask came down like a vulture to clutch at the bones of his cheeks, steadying his skull with its claws in order to pluck out the delicacies of his fainting eyes. . . . "I never would have got into this if I'd had any sense."
>
> "Yes you would. You might have held out for a few more weeks. Then you would have had no choice at all."
>
> "There's never a time in his life when a man doesn't have a choice." [Will said.] (Hudson, 1962, pp. 257, 304).

Next to, or probably equal to George, Will is the most important character in the novel. He is almost in total contrast to George, at least in philosophical expression. Both are farmers and both delight in the harvest, but Will respects living things because he sees them as part of a universal plan. George's interest in living things is limited to their profit or loss to him. Will is humble and generous. George is proud and distrustful. Will knows he is a pawn, yet he gives thanks for life even as he faces death. George insists he is in control until the end. Both help their neighbors, but Will does so out of generosity, and George only because it is expected of him. Will pities the less fortunate, like the men who wait in lines for work, and the down-and-out Mrs. Finley. George resents the help he must give Otto Wilkes. George is proud and cannot understand a weak and desperate man like Wilkes; George is fiercely competitive, and suspicious. The system and the universe must be wrong if he can't make a living. Will is by nature optimistic, "I think maybe the world is starting to get some sense" (Hudson, 1962, p. 133). Later even though Will admits "The world was as sick as he was," he immediately rebukes himself, remembering that

> He himself was supposed to have different views. He was a grateful man. All his life he had been grateful for the world. All his life he had fought to preserve life, to nurture it (Hudson, 1962, p. 306).

Will is a humanitarian; he strives to make his progeny happy. He looks to himself for explanations for Stuart's self-destructiveness.

> Handling one's children was not so different from planting a wheat crop, Will thought. A man just had to go ahead and plant, and then believe and pray that the forces he could not see or predict would be a little bit cordial, a little bit reasonable, a little bit responsive (Hudson, 1962, p. 345).

He is Lucy's one true friend, and tries to help her retain the light of her smile. His only legacy to her will be a personal note of love and concern. Although it is perhaps necessary, George's concern for his family is secondary to his concern to succeed on the farm. Will wishes to succeed in order to secure some comfort to his children, but George thinks any comforting is synonomous with spoiling. Will sees beauty. He is often associated with flowers. He sees the windmill as a flower, his wife's name is a flower, he relates the faces of children to flowers. George is incapable of perceiving beauty apart from practicality. He loves the meadowlark, but only because it eats pests, not because of its beautiful yellow, white and brown coloring or its song.

Where Will is most in obvious contrast to George is in their basic orientation to life. Although suggested above, it is best discussed in the context of broader philosophies. Will is a fatalist, as is Stuart, but he is an optimistic fatalist. George is violently individualist. Stuart's fatalism and George's individualism fade in significance, become negative values, when seen in contrast to Will's philosophy. Like Job and Qoholeth, his strength and value come from a recognition that there are no absolutes. Will too

> proffers a philosophy of resignation. . . . IT arises . . . from the necessity of caution and moderation before the inexplicable, on the acceptance of what is fated and cannot be changed, and finally on grasping firmly the only satisfaction open to men--the enjoyment of being alive (Pope, 1965, pp. 191-92).

At this point, the author's ironic despair is at its best. With George, the fiercely individualist proponent of free enterprise defeated, the supposition would be that his opposite, Will, would suggest that direction in which deliverance could be found. But the fact remains--death is the ultimate victor, the single certainty of life. Even though Will accepts his lot, understands how little man knows, understands that the laws work for good as well as for evil, comprehends what little power he has, this knowledge does not make him free. He had learned to face and accept whatever came to him. But we are not even sure that his one last hope--to die with dignity--was fulfilled. After a life time of working with the land to be able to leave his children the means by which they might make themselves comfortable and secure, the land will not accept him. It has to be dynamited, and twenty sticks are necessary to open the ground for his grave.

Will is a symbol too. He had "made it" during the good years by adhering to the pioneer virtues which George still believes in, still flaunts and fights for. But Will had come to see that the good days were over for the individual, small farmer. He urges Stuart to go to school and Rose to sell the farm so that Stuart would not spend his "'life scraping droppings out of a hen house and selling eggs for thirteen cents a dozen!'" (Hudson, 1962, p. 348). When Rose protests that they "'are in good shape. How many farmers own their farms outright?'" Will replies:

> "I tell you, you're not thinking right. That's the way George thinks. He's always talking about how he's in the top fifty per cent. You and I are in the top ten per cent, and still we haven't made anything for years!" (Hudson, 1962, p. 350).

Will then signs an acreage control contract which commits most of his wheat acreage to a type of soil bank. He spends some time thinking about the human situation. "It came to him that rarely was a man really fair in his life. Not till a man was dying could he afford to see things as they really were" (Hudson, 1962, p. 354). He considers that even though it seemed that himself, his children and his children's children had somehow all been sacrificed to the many-faced monster of the force, there was still reason to glory in life and give thanks to God. He prays, "We give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory, O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty . . ." (Hudson, 1962, p. 357).

Will's death is an explicit sign that the inexorable power exists and always triumphs over man.

CHAPTER III

REAPERS OF THE DUST

Hudson's Reapers of the Dust, like The Bones of Plenty, is concerned with the development of the idea that man lives in "a universe . . . populated with inimical forces" (Hudson, 1964, p. 74). However, the collection is not limited to that idea alone and, happily, it affirms that the author is not limited exclusively to the expression of her cultural inheritance. As well-crafted, complex, and sustained as The Bones of Plenty is, Reapers of the Dust shows a refined philosophic development. Both works discuss common human problems--the place of woman in a society, the inherent, but probably unavoidable, injustices of our economic system, the painful process of maturation from a childhood to an adult existence. Both works examine the idea of a governing power from several different perspectives; both books vividly describe intense physical and emotional pain. But where The Bones of Plenty is unrelentingly bitter from the opening to the end, Reapers of the Dust, while it is not without its harsh elements, does contain bits of bright or wry humor. The bitter war between the sexes is re-evaluated and redefined as a war between generations or a conflict between responsibility and dependence. The relentless force of the novel is reduced to an understandable if not a less grim principle. And the final piece in the collection, "The Loop in Time," is a master's work. It is a touching, warm-

hearted essay on the evolution of human family life. The essence of The Bones of Plenty is failure, even the failure of human love. The idea that love is compensation for human griefs and disillusionment is introduced in Reapers of the Dust.

Most of the pieces in the collection were first published individually in periodicals--The Reporter, The New Yorker and The Atlantic Monthly. Individually the works may be viewed as nostalgic chronicles of a forever-past rural Americana ("King's Birthday" and "Buggy on the Roof"), as reminiscences of a prairie childhood ("The Dust Storm" and "The Cold Wave"), or as mild criticisms of a classed society ("Children of the Harvest" and "Room at the Bottom"). Taken as a collection, the stories of Reapers of the Dust can be seen as the author's effort to discover explanations and answers to the eternal questions that mere human existence raises for mankind. Hudson, in a very brief preface to the collection, tells us that "our understandings can go no farther than the truths we discover in our struggles to comprehend the particular moment of eternity we chance to inhabit" (Hudson, 1964).

The force that motivates and defines the characters of Hudson's novel is important to this body of work and is most explicitly discussed in "The Water Witch," the tale closest in subject matter and theme to The Bones of Plenty. The setting is North Dakota in 1931. Benjamin, a kind of village idiot, rises in esteem because of his ability to divine water during the nine-year-old drought. Benjamin locates a water vein for the narrator's father. A well is dug and its water sustains them for nearly a year. A three-day heat wave, with temperatures at midday of 112 degrees, kills the nestling birds and the yet

fledgling garden vegetables. The well then dries up. The family, like the one in The Bones of Plenty, is compelled to auction the "sad trappings of . . . permanence" and "move to another place where there would not be so many enemies of roots" (Hudson, 1964, p. 82).

As it is in the novel, the idea of an unseen but powerful force motif is central and many faceted in this narrative. It is explicit ("inimical forces," p. 77), symbolic ("invisible being and magical forces," p. 77), and figurative ("it's just like it was taking the stomach right out of me," p. 76) (Hudson, 1964). The motif of roots is also pervasive and functions similarly in both works. The water vein is followed down to the roots of an elm tree, garden vegetables are planted and root indoors, then they are up-rooted by a torrential rain after having died from lack of moisture. And finally, the family is forced to abandon their family home site--the place where they have put down roots.

Several other stories in the collection are set in rural North Dakota, and they too share the idea of a superpower shaping the events and lives of their characters. But unlike "the inimical forces" in "The Water Witch," the power that shapes the other narratives is abstracted. In two stories, "The Dust Storm" and "The Cold Wave," the generating factor is the weather--the wind in the first:

> In the Koslov's field behind the school, last year's dead tumbleweeds . . . unwound their roots from the disintegrating earth and came sweeping erratically across the ground at us. We played a game of tag with these brown stinging monsters, the tangible claws of the unseen wind, the articulation of its anger (Hudson, 1964, p. 7).

In "The Cold Wave" the pervasive winter cold is the manifestation of the idea:

> . . . The tub, refilled after we had emptied it for the stock was standing in the corner of the kitchen next to the door. The snow in

> it was still heaped in a neat cone. It was odd to think of a tub of snow standing inside our house, where we had slept the night, and never feeling the warmth of the stove a few feet away--to think of how the tiny flow of air around the storm-lined door was more powerful than the stove filled with coal (Hudson, 1964, p. 67).

In both stories the abstraction represents a recurring theme in Hudson's work--man's attempt to control his environment is most often ineffectual, and his arrogance and ignorance is almost laughable. Man, for all his progress, has never been able to control the wind, and his inconsiderable inventions are all but powerless to protect him from the immense energies of nature. The little coal-filled stove and the storm-lined door provide but little protection against the overwhelming cold wave that extends itself across many miles. In another of the short pieces, "Work for the Night is Coming," Hudson abstracts the idea even further. As the title suggests, work is the form that the governing principle takes. The youthful narrator makes a discovery that the cycles of life are controlled:

> The work of one creature meant the death of another. The worm killed the tomato plant; my aunt killed the worm; the sun, in a manner of speaking, would finally kill my aunt. Work and death--two things equally ineluctable, equally significant, equally definite--so oddly connected in so many ways (Hudson, 1964, p. 36).

Like Rose Shepard in The Bones of Plenty, "Aunt Clara's only virtue, only vice, only reward, was work" (Hudson, 1964, p. 32). The child of the story sees Aunt Clara's behavior as guided by something beyond mere human motivation. The work is dictated by the needs of survival, and, ironically, the work of survival leads to the ultimate deterioration of the being that is caught up in the cycle.

In Reapers of the Dust a theme of initiation or awakening is a new dimension in Hudson's work. In "Gopher Hunting" she restates her

resentment of the myth of male supremacy. And, even though parts of the story sound very much like the Lucy narratives of The Bones of Plenty, from the beginning to the unconventional denouement, the story has a mellower tone. She qualifies the supposed feminine inferiority as having been established from a false criterion. Hudson's North Dakota men admit that,

> there may be some things a woman is born to be better at. Like bathing a baby, for instance. But . . . North Dakota men didn't bathe babies, so the question never came up. On the other hand, the question of women and the important tasks of life came up all the time, and since women were judged by how much wheat they could shock or how many cows they could milk, they were almost always doomed to inferiority (Hudson, 1964, pp. 15-16).

The story continues to discuss the idea of feminine inferiority, keeping within a narrow margin of sympathy for the young girl. Her manipulation of a motif of pain is masterful! She describes a physical as well as a psychological pain that is shared equally by the youthful character of the story and by the reader. Who cannot but empathize and imagine the horror of "taking a rock in my hand and bringing it down on the head of a tiny frantic animal whose foot bled around a trap." Hudson's skill with language is brilliantly in evidence in this piece. After the above example of combined psychological and physical pain, Ms. Hudson distills the pain motif into purely psychological pain. The narrator tells how she sprung the trap, and then "spent the rest of the morning steeling myself against the pain of my father's disgust" (Hudson, 1964, p. 19). The tiny animal is caught in spite of what she has done to avoid its happening, and the little girl is told to dispose of the body. "I saw the dead gopher, his disheveled head bleeding and his pert little jaws askew. . . . I picked him up tenderly by his valuable tail. . . . I took

a stick and scooped a grave for him, covering it with blades of grass and the indifferent faces of dandelion" (Hudson, 1964, pp. 19-20).

The evocative phrasing elicits ironic but real sympathy for a destructive rodent. A gopher hole in barn yard or pasture is an ever real danger for the stiff and unwary legs of the valuable and probably irreplaceable farm livestock.

This underlying ironic pattern emerges fully at the climax of the story. The little girl spends the remainder of the day in competition and companionship with her friend Peter. Slowly they realize that the day has passed, darkness has caught them in the slough, and they are lost.

> We looked at each other in the dusk and then we looked for the shore we had left so far behind, but all we could see was the thicket of reeds around us.

Much of the day the little girl had been painfully aware of her female inferiority. Then in a clever reversal, the author makes a profound and unusual reassessment of the traditional male versus female situation.

> All day long the only thing my sex had meant was that I was inferior, but then in a flash of desperate insight I understood, for the first time in my life, the advantages that logically accrued to females if males were to deny them equality. If boys were smarter, bolder, stronger, and steadier than girls, then Peter was responsible for getting us into this mess and he was supposed to be able to get us out. It was his fault that I had not minded my mother. For once the world was all on my side (Hudson, 1964, p. 26).

At the narrative's end, what had been a vehement protest against a hurtful and a restrictive sexual stereotyping in The Bones of Plenty has mellowed to a humanistic, wryly humorous understanding of the realities of a harsh prairie existence.

> I felt sorry for . . . [Peter], having to sit so small and dirty and sheepish in the scorching heat of my father's fury all the way to town. It was the first time I had ever felt sorry for a boy, and

> I began to sense that perhaps the war wasn't so much between male and female as it was between generations (Hudson, 1964, p. 28).

"When the Fields are Fresh and Green" continues the awakening theme. It too is concerned somewhat with the war between the generations--a child is disappointed for the first time by her mother's efforts to please her. It is not as powerful a story as "Gopher Hunting," not as cleverly crafted, but still constructed with some fine understated examples of irony:

> After hard study of her diagrams, Edith [the town spinster] had produced an Easter lily. It had long pointed petals of snaky white paper and enormous reproductive organs made of the threads with the yellow nodules at their ends.

The story contains Hudson's typically apt descriptions and continues the same wry humor.

> It was clear to me that furniture like that could come alive at night when people were asleep. . . .
>
> In another corner of the parlor sat old Mrs. Bagley, who did not, like the furniture, look as though she might be alive. The top part of her was gray and white with sweater and hair and skin and cloudy spectacles. The bottom part of her was gay in the way a new grave is gay--all covered with spots of color woven from wilted flowers over a shockingly high mound. The mound of her under the festive mosaic of her afgan was appalling because you couldn't imagine a regular body under there, with stomach and hips and legs. What could have been under that afgan? (Hudson, 1964, p. 89).

Further the story continues to amplify the mellower aspects of Lois Hudson's style. It is a story that discusses the reality of an adult versus a childhood existence, and in the narrative the child becomes aware of the discrepancy between the two worlds. But the story re-establishes the idea that the human capacity for love is a compensation for the disillusionments that are the concomitants of human existence.

> Now that I am grown, I have discovered that our second existence does bring us one surprise--love. Now that I have children of my own, I try, as my mother did, to save their first existences for them, even though I know it is impossible. All the generations of

> us will go on forever trying to save the green fields for each other and we will always fail, but because it is for love that we try to do what is impossible, we redeem our second existence (Hudson, 1964, p. 97).

Two other stories, "Children of the Harvest" and "Room at the Bottom" are more closely akin to initiation narratives than to a theme of an awakening. Unrelieved psychological pain, class consciousness, loss of personal identity and values as a result of having lost a sense of place (roots) are the controlling patterns of these two works. They are closely related to the bitterer tone and to the failure motif of The Bones of Plenty. "Children of the Harvest" recounts the autobiographical happenings of the author's first experiences as a member of a migrant family of fruit pickers. In it she tells of the thrill she felt when she earned her first whole dollar in one day by picking hops. Her elation is short-lived, and she is soon made to feel that her feat is inconsequential. She suffers for the first time the "suspicion felt by those who plant toward those who do not plant" (Hudson, 1964, p. 11). Hudson's work is often compared with John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath, a comparison which is not exactly accurate. Hudson's material is similar in that her people are manipulated by conditions against which they have no defense, and they have lost their farm, but, as Lois Hudson points out in the June 1, 1962 issue of Library Journal:

> Midwestern farmers were not simply "tractored" out as Steinbeck explained it all in "The Grapes of Wrath." They were victims of gigantic political and economic forces over which they, no matter how intelligent and hard-working, could never hope to triumph.

"Children of the Harvest" illustrates the above point. The characters in the story are intelligent and hard-working. The little girl of the story is the first migrant child ever to be promoted to the "A" class,

but she had yet to learn

> that it was disgraceful and dirty to be a transient laborer and ridiculous to be from North Dakota (Hudson, 1964, p. 112).

"Room at the Bottom" develops in greater detail the disillusionment theme suggested by "Children of the Harvest." Even in the first part of the story the narrator has matured enough to be "pretty sure that the world was not quite the way people who made movies about it thought it was" (Hudson, 1964, p. 119). But by the end she has been convinced that "just because you were willing to exchange your Head, Heart, Health, and Hands for a place at the bottom, you wouldn't necessarily fine one" (Hudson, 1964, p. 134). That nice irony, "a place at the bottom," is the final articulation of the narrator's complete recognition that the realities of one's socio-economic position were inescapable. She says:

> Once I had believed what everybody told me: that there was always room at the top. (Nobody had told me that there was always room at the bottom: people don't say things like that to children.) But now I understood that the room at the top had disappeared along with the good bottom-land (Hudson, 1964, p. 132).

The final two stories, along with "Gopher Hunting," are superb. At first reading "Epitaph for a Lion" appears to be a mere nostalgic piece, a reminiscence about a childhood adventure, the discovery that a mountain lion had come down into their neighborhood. The story is set on the West Coast during World War II. It is guessed that the lion has come into their valley because he is too old to hunt the wild game of the hills and he must now rely on domestic livestock for food. Despite their losses to him, he becomes a reassuring symbol to the people of the valley. When awakened in the night by his horrible screams they are relieved that

> . . . it was only the cougar screaming. The war was less than a year old then, and we were living in partial blackout, wondering if the radio would fall silent and we would hear the echoes of Japanese bombs crumbling Seattle into Puget Sound. There was little that ordinary people could do, besides conscientiously adjusting their blackout blinds and memorizing the instructions for what to do if an incendiary bomb hit the house. (Never use a hose. Incendiary bombs are too hot to be extinguished by water and a stream of water will only spread the fire. Douse with sand.) . . . The thing about the lion was that he presented a threat which could be dealt with rationally. We had only to stay out of the hills and we would be safe (Hudson, 1964, pp. 140-41).

That quote is the key that opens up an entirely new aspect to the story. It wryly points out man's inherent irrationality:

> I always wondered how you could get close enough to something that hot to douse sand on it, assuming that you were holding a bucket of sand when the bomb came through the ceiling (Hudson, 1964, p. 141).

It recounts in yet another way the eternal complexities of man's existence. As the child of "Work for the Night is Coming" learns:

> The work of one creature meant the death of another. . . . Work and death--two things equally ineluctable, equally significant, equally definite--so oddly connected in so many ways (Hudson, 1964, p. 36).

On one level both stories are obviously nostalgic recounts of childhood events. On a second level they are both allegorical. Further, "Epitaph for a Lion" is an exemplum. The underlying structure is built upon the apparently simple story of the mountain lion invading their neighborhood. The sub-structure is gently alluded to but emerges convincingly on serious consideration by the reader. The story is an indictment against the follies of man. Like the author of The Bones of Plenty, the author of this story is dismayed by man's basic and paradoxical ignorance. It is true, as she points out, that man has built an advanced civilization, but at what cost? "The war was less than a year old then . . . There was little that ordinary people could do." Man's forever evolving

progress "upward" is symbolized in the story by the progression from ferry boats to bridges, graveled roads "modernized with asphalt," small truck and dairy farms sold to developers of "'view lots' overlooking each other down concrete terraces" (Hudson, 1964, pp. 138, 143, 144). The progress of one race (civilization) leads to the exploitation of another. Progress and exploitation "--two things equally ineluctable, equally significant, equally definite--so oddly connected in so many ways."

The cougar and the dogs of the story illustrate the above abstract principle.

> The classic hatred of cat for dog and dog for cat blown into such massive scale was suddenly deliriously funny . . . [The treed] lion was at the very edge of the woods where we stopped farming and let the jungle take over . . . The dogs from the entire valley began arriving for the fight . . . They came yelping across the yard, shedding civilization with every bound [emphasis mine] their jaws foamy and their tongues stretched out purple just from the effort of getting to the scene of action (Hudson, 1964, p. 142).

The treed cat is not killed by the dogs;

> they began regaining their sanity and thinking about overdue dinners . . . [went] slinking back . . . pausing to throw back hoarse insults over their shoulders, and then panting home to recuperate from their heroism. . . . The cougar either died of old age or retired to another valley for good (Hudson, 1964, p. 143).

The cat and the dogs function as symbols to explain the conditions of human existence. The cat, like the tiny stream of cold air in "The Cold Wave," symbolized the enormous complexities of nature. The dogs (originally wild, like the cat, but now "civilized") represent man's puny attempts to assail and control nature.

The final narrative of Reapers of the Dust is a beautiful essay. In it Ms. Hudson explores yet another human phenomena--the interconnectedness and evolution of human familial development. This story is

autobiographical, recalling the incidental and the significant memories of youth which shape or contribute to one's sense of identity. But even though the story is a personal narrative, it is fundamentally an explication of yet another cycle. As the title suggests, "The Loop in Time," and as the discussion of the preceding works often points out, Lois Hudson is very much concerned with the eternal circularity of human problems. Ms. Hudson writes:

> I have always felt that one of the main challenges and responsibilities of fiction is to explain the inexplicable. I write in order to try to understand. I first figured this out when I was about 18, and thought myself very clever for figuring it out. Now I know that every writer feels this way (Hudson, 1974).

"The Loop in Time" is a sterling example of her search for understanding. The story is dedicated to and ostensibly is about her two grandmothers. It begins as the prairie is made pure and unblemished by a blanket of virgin snow. The prairie children fidget as the

> snow slips through the barbed wire, fills the wide, deep, straight ditches, spills across the falling fans of lath fences; snow wraps softly the wheel of the world and stops the wheel of the merry-go-round (Hudson, 1964, p. 149).

They are afraid that the snow will stop covering the earth before they've had a chance to stamp their impressions into the fresh new surface of the plains. At recess the children play a game of fox and geese.

> One begins the circle--they call it a pie--and all follow. . . the wobbly loop meets its beginning with its end . . . until . . nobody knows any more--not even he who began and closed the circle--where the last boot track met the first (Hudson, 1964, pp. 149-50).

Before they have had enough play time, recess is over. "There was so much more space than there was time" (Hudson, 1964, p. 150).

In a passage that is unmistakably reminiscent of T. S. Eliot, the author remarks that

> There will be time enough to discover, if they care to, the place where the loop meets--the secret of the circle. There will be time enough to understand, time enough to meet themselves, time enough to prove that they are unique (Hudson, 1964, p. 150).

That passage contains the theme of this beautiful essay. In "The Loop in Time" Lois Hudson unravels as much of the "secret of the circle" as she is able to. In it she takes time "to understand."

From the opening image of a circle stamped in the snow, the author moves to another, more abstract, larger circle image--the cycle of youth to age. The course of human life is one great circle; it is begun by one generation and closed by another, because each generation looks to the other to solve the secrets of life.

"The Loop in Time" is structured on a beautiful series of contrasts. The two grandmothers form the foundation, they are the opposing arcs that form a circle. Her mother's mother is a prairie woman, wears prairie colors, is frugal, reserved, dignified and proud. The other grandmother is a mountain woman. In spite of having been transplanted to the plains, and in spite of having experienced many of the same conditions, she is not at all like the prairie grandmother. The father's mother bears bright colors--green and purple, in combination! She is uninhibited, gay, openly affectionate, generous, and humble. The prairie grandmother "was so proud she believed it was possible for a human being to justify his existence" (Hudson, 1964, p. 158). The mountain grandmother "was too humble to think of apologizing for her existence" (Hudson, 1964, p. 161). Both women see their granddaughter as exactly like themselves. The contrasts of the two produce a third personality.

> Each of them dilutes in me the other. The rectitude of one haunts the gaiety of the other; the prodigality of one subverts the providence of the other. They gave me the gifts of the two hastening

> clashing cells themselves--the gift of worlds coming together (Hudson, 1964, p. 167).

By spelling out the contrasts of the two grandmothers, by trying to find an explanation for the differences in the two women, by looking to them to solve the riddles of time for her, the author perceives that all the while she was looking to them for answers to the eternal questions, they, in turn, were patiently waiting for her to reveal to them the answers to their questions.

> During all those years when I looked to them to show me the loop in time, they were looking to me for the same thing. They had been watching me for my secrets, expecting to come around a corner and meet themselves in me. They thought that I must be able to see something they had missed. I had always believed that it was the ones who had gone before me who understood the circle and where they belonged in it, but instead they supposed that it was the ones coming after them who would understand (Hudson, 1964, p. 172).

Youth looks to age; age expects that youth will provide solutions that they were unable to suggest. This is the circle, and the secret of the circle is the understanding that "our second existence [maturity] does bring one surprise--love. . . ." And that is all one can hope for as compensation for the inadequacies, disappointments and failures of human existence.

CHAPTER IV

REPUTATION

In 1962 when The Bones of Plenty was published it was reviewed in many major American newspapers--N. Y. Times, N. Y. Herald Tribune, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune. And perhaps because it was a novel whose subject matter was rural America, reviews of the novel appeared in newspapers from literally every section of the United States.[1] The trade papers--Publishers' Weekly, Book Buyers' Guide, Booklist, Library Journal--commended and recommended the book. All the newspaper reviews praised it. Victor P. Hass's review, which appeared in the August 5, 1962, New York Times Book Review is illustrative. He says:

> It is possible--one does not, of course, know--that literary historians of the future will decide that "The Bones of Plenty" was the farm novel of the Great Drought of the Nineteen-Twenties and Nineteen-Thirties and the Great Depression. Better than any other novel of the period with which I am familiar, Lois Phillips Hudson's story presents, with intelligence and rare understanding, the frightful disaster . . . (Hass, 1962).

A few reviewers, although praising the whole book, claimed her work was flawed in characterization:

> She falters only occasionally--and then merely in her portrait of Custer (Hass, 1962).
>
> She defeats her purpose of showing what life at that time was really like in creating so unlikeable a character [Custer] (Wichita Times, Wichita Falls, Texas, 1962).

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[1]See List of References for complete listing.

> The author also attempts to evoke rural poetry through the perceptions of Lucy. . . . here alone her characterization seemed curiously flat (Sloat, 1962).

A few other reviewers compare her work unfavorably and unjustifiably with John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath.

> It was perhaps inevitable that the publishers of this novel should invoke a comparison with "The Grapes of Wrath." While the present book does not achieve the memorable power and prose of the earlier one, it is a vigorous, accurate description . . . (News, Buffalo, New York, 1962).

> And "The Bones of Plenty" is a good book. Perhaps not the classic sort that Steinbeck wrote on the Okies . . . (Adams, 1962).

> . . . "The Bones of Plenty," the most passionate depiction since "The Grapes of Wrath" of the farmers' plight a generation ago. Like John Steinbeck, Lois Hudson brings passionate indignation to her account of the North Dakota farmers' plight, especially in 1933-34 . . . (Burnett, 1962).

> As history, the book is not completely successful. John Steinbeck made us feel it in "The Grapes of Wrath" by showing masses of ex-farmers living as desperate migrants. As an historical document, "The Bones of Plenty" is perhaps best read as a prelude to "The Grapes of Wrath" (Cosbey, 1962).

In response to the frequent comparison to The Grapes of Wrath, Lois Hudson says, "I get so sick of being compared invidiously with Steinbeck" (Hudson, 1974b). Her resentment is understandable. As the last quote suggests, the action of The Grapes of Wrath begins just where that of The Bones of Plenty ends. Although not similar enough to demand such frequent comparisons, both novels have two common controlling patterns. Both novels express, in differing forms, vehement social protest; both novels are controlled by the inescapable pressure of a malevolent superpower. It is to be hoped that it is those similarities that inspired the reviewers to make the comparisons. The New York Herald Tribune's reviewer provides an explanation for such comparisons:

> Novels of the depression-ridden farmers automatically invite comparison with John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath," but "The

> Bones of Plenty" is not a dramatic novel of idealized migrant workers. Instead, it is a terse picture of the original disasters which wrenched farmers from their homes and set them on an exodus toward a good world they had never seen.
>
> It is a bitter novel, written in an objective and finished style with a piling up of agonies which creates a parable for modern times with an argument that natural malevolence combined with human frailty leaves men not only unable to endure but unlikely even to escape (1962).

The most prestigious review of the novel appeared in The Saturday Review, August 11, 1962. Gordon Webber, perhaps unconsciously, describes the novel in phrases strongly suggestive of The Grapes of Wrath:

> Mrs. Hudson has taken pains to tell us exactly how it was to be a tenant farm family . . . when the impoverished Custer family packs its pitiful belongings into a trailer and heads for California.
>
> Those were desperate times, and Mrs. Hudson has given her story a hard-bitten, regional veracity. It is all here: the plummeting price of wheat, the dust storms that blackened the noonday sun, and the hungry, haunted men who waited for a day's employment on the streets of the little towns (Webber, 1962).

His criticism of the book is confined to his dislike (a nearly universal sentiment) of George Custer and to the length of the book:

> . . . his unrelieved rancor finally grows wearisome, as does some of the explicit recounting of ordinary incidents. One wishes that Mrs. Hudson had been more selective, and that she had built more drama and tension into the incidents depicted.

But Webber's overall judgment, like that of the many other reviewers, is favorable.

> With all its careful documentation of the Great Depression in the Dakotas--and here Mrs. Hudson succeeds very well--it is a child's-eye view of this harsh, irrational world that gives her novel its greatest distinction and style (Webber, 1962, p. 26).

The Bones of Plenty was published by William Heinemann Limited, London, England, in February 1964. The British reviews were very favorable. The New Statesman's review tersely describes the novel as

> somber. . . . perhaps most valuable as a documentary. . . . It describes the unity of land, weather and life, the erosion of soil and spirit. . . . it also records its story well (Salvesen, 1964).

Punch praises the fine characterization:

> the people are drawn decisively enough to make them stand out from similar people in similar books. . . . as a family chronicle . . . it is extremely readable (Price, 1964).

The Glasgow Herald described the book as a "minor epic" and said it "succeeds where so many similar novels fail. . . ." Only one review had a less than favorable comment, and that was merely that

> she does not write with the same dramatic quality and primitive power [as John Steinbeck does] but [she] succeeds in presenting a vivid picture . . . (Guardian Journal, Nottingham, 1964).

The most unusual and one of the most surprisingly accurate reviews of Hudson's novel was done in the Bulletin of the Entomological Society of America. The reviewer introduced the book with:

> Although novels are not normally reviewed in the Bulletin, this story of North Dakota wheat farmers during the early 1930's is well worthy of an exception.

He praises "the obvious and stark authenticity of the material" giving credit to the author's fine "memory" and "untiring research into the economy and events of the period."

His further interpretive comments are as perceptive, perhaps more so, than those of most other reviewers. He describes the work as

> a moving and logical account that runs the full cycle of human emotions. Humor and pathos, love and hate, satisfaction and frustration are all treated with equal facility (Favinger, 1963).

From all that I have been able to find out, the author received only praise for the work. From her file she sent me copies of letters from prominent literary figures. Harvey Swados is most complimentary, and gracious in writing to Ms. Hudson about her book.

> Although I have already written to . . . the publicity fellow of Little Brown, I want to tell you "personally" that I think you have written a fine book. I would in any case have had to write you a polite note; how much more satisfying it is to be able to be really honestly enthusiastic about your solid achievement!
>
> Not only are you a natural story-teller, you also know how to build a novel (which many story-tellers don't). And you have succeeded in creating 2 men, the grandfather and the father, who are as compelling as any in recent American fiction.
>
> You have fine things ahead of you and I am very happy for you (Swados, 1962).

Her editor at Atlantic-Little, Brown includes the following information concerning Hudson's honors and awards:

> In 1962 Mrs. Hudson received the $1,000 Friends of American Writers Prize. The Bones of Plenty was also a Literary Guild Selection (Beck, 1974).

Most of the reviews of The Bones of Plenty, except those found in major newspapers, I received from Ms. Hudson. She was not able to furnish me with as many reviews of Reapers of the Dust, however, because she had long ago lent out her file and it has never been returned. Her editor at Atlantic-Little, Brown sent a few reviews. I located reviews in the Sunday Denver Post, the Omaha World-Herald, the Chicago Tribune Books Today, and The Nation. In the Denver Post, Stanton Peckham credits Ms. Hudson with "unique skill." He reports that

> she writes with such human understanding, such a keen sense of humor, and such style, that every anecdote sharpens the appetite for the next.

He suggests that

> what distinguishes Lois Phillips Hudson from other writers who attempt to put over the same bucolic material, and fail, is that while one senses deep sentiment in her writing there is no shred of sentimentality (Peckham, 1965).

Victor P. Hass reviewed this book also in two different newspapers--the Omaha World-Herald and the Chicago Tribune Books Today. He was very impressed with Ms. Hudson's second book. He admits that he

approached Reapers of the Dust with apprehension because he feared that the author might have overextended herself by using the same material from which she created, so well, The Bones of Plenty. He professes to be relieved to see that Lois Hudson had not "come up with a dud the second time." He continues

> I need not have worried. Mrs. Hudson still is working the mine of her drouth-depression memories in "Reapers of the Dust" and the ore remains first-rate (Hass, 1965a).

In both reviews, typically, he recounts rather than interprets, but, he praises Hudson's efforts, and in both reviews credits her with the ability to express and to recreate the universal experiences of those times, the feelings and emotions of those who lived then. It is a commendable literary achievement since Lois Hudson was in her mid-thirties when her two books were published. The events which she writes so convincingly about happened before she was ten years old (Hass, 1965a, 1965b).

Curtis Harnack's long review of Reapers of the Dust, published in The Nation, is a detailed and reliable, as well as an interpretative, article. Unlike most reviewers who make passing observations that the book "Inevitably [brings], because of the similarity of subject matter, John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath . . . to mind," Harnack discusses the surface similarity and then dismisses the comparison as invalid.

> His characters are one-dimensional types fleshed in to serve the thesis of the book, whereas Mrs. Hudson operates under no such limitation.
>
> One has only to reread The Grapes of Wrath, with its souped-up prose and its calculated pitch to the times, to see that Steinbeck's sensibilities about his material were so shallow that the book can now have only historic interest.

The one similarity that he sees between the two books is "the savage bitterness that characterizes Steinbeck's novel is also found in Mrs. Hudson's two books" (Harnack, 1965).

Mr. Harnack objects to Mr. Hass's often quoted phrase that The Bones of Plenty may be "the farm novel." Harnack says that Hass, by using such a phrase

> . . . betrayed a misunderstanding of the intentions of any serious literary artist: he confused the setting and materials of the book with the total purpose of the work. Mrs. Hudson's probing does not stop with a revelation of how things were, and how they might have been different if the social forces had not operated in such a cruel manner; her interest is in the human condition itself, the pain and sharpness felt by any life that veers close to the bone. In these fat days, this is the discussion she wishes to raise. The Great Depression, as happens in all calamities, brought about a heightened sense of the human predicament--a predicament that cannot ever be totally solved by reform movements or proper unionization. Her final interests are more metaphysical than social (Harnack, 1965).

Harnack's review is as close as Ms. Hudson's work has come to receiving critical interpretation. Her work has been consistently praised, and received much attention at the time of publication. John Rolfe Burroughs sent her the following note:

> Lois, I am an honest man--and, in some respects a hard one (as hard as your father).
>
> I have read "Where the fields . . .", and I salute you! Alas, we imaginative people live in a wrong age! Bret Harte won a national reputation on a lesser story.
>
> Do something for me: please re-read the epilogue in "Where the Old West Stayed Young" and you will know how deeply moved I was--and am--by your magnificent story!

Ms. Hudson's personal file also contains the following note, written by Katherine Anne Porter to Atlantic-Little, Brown:

> Thank you immensely for Mrs. Hudson's splendid book, Reapers of the Dust. I don't quite catch your shade of meaning in describing her as "iconoclast," because for me she seemed to be doing a solid rehabilitating job, an answer in pure human speech to the sub-human characters in Grapes of Wrath or Tobacco Road. Maybe this is because she is within her scene, a living part of it, and not a tourist with a note-book. The freshness of her eye, the living abundance of her memory, the depths of her love of life and her complete frankness and lack of illusion about it, without bitterness: these traits and qualities are rare; add to it her jolly sense of comedy,--

> and now, I think I am beginning to understand what you meant by "iconoclast"--that Mrs. Hudson simply by the positive act of searching her heart and her mind and her own unique vision of her life in this time and this place, has taken the first step to pulling down the grubby little notions that the poor, the disinherited, the ignorant are always and ever indecent, obscene, foul in word and deed, the object of condescension, ridicule and sentimental blubberings.
>
> I hope you sell a million.

The item however ends with:

> Please don't use my words about Reapers on a jacket. I don't write blurbs, I have refused consistently for forty years, but I still get invitations three times a week (average) asking me to write one, usually for a dreary little dud I can't even read. This book pleases me so much I wish I had time to review it; if you want to pick out a few lines to use in an advertisement, do, please, BUT NOTHING ON A JACKET. I will leave the choice to you, please pick the most sensible.

It is perhaps understandable but indeed unfortunate that Miss Porter would not publically acknowledge the words of praise she had for Hudson's work. Her comments could conceivably have generated a critical interest in Lois Hudson's work. It is an unhappy fact that, in spite of the considerable praise and attention her books received at time of publication, Lois Hudson's work has achieved virtually no critical reputation.

In looking through bibliographies of the last twelve years, I did not discover even one article devoted to her by name. Notably, she is not listed in Etulain's Western American Literature: A Bibliography of Interpretive Books and Articles (1972). I discovered only one article in which her name and work were mentioned--"The Success Theme in Great Plains Realism," Saum, 1966.

Through personal contacts and correspondence, I was introduced to two articles which briefly discuss Hudson's work--Milton, 1970, and Peyroutet, 1971. Ms. Hudson's work is given considerable attention by

Peyroutet in his Master's thesis, "The Farm Novel as an Interpretation of North Dakota." And Roy W. Meyer includes some discussion of her novel in his book, The Middle Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century. Both describe and praise its merit as being an example of farm fiction--a description much too limiting.

I have been in correspondence with several acknowledged Midwestern scholars--Roy W. Meyer, Gerald Nemanic, John T. Flanagan, Clarence Andrews, David Anderson, John R. Milton--and, although they are all familiar with her work, they could not contribute anything to a discussion of her literary reputation. Gerald Nemanic is compiling a bibliography of Midwestern literature in which Lois Hudson's work will be included. Clarence Andrews, who has already published A Literary History of Iowa, is now working on a literary history of the Midwest, and he plans to include her work in his study. David Anderson of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature published a notice in the Summer issue of the Newsletter requesting information on Hudson for me, but there was no response.

John R. Milton reviewed The Bones of Plenty for the Minneapolis Tribune in 1962, and he also included mention of Hudson in his article entitled "Dakota Images" (Milton, 1970). In addition to having been editor of the South Dakota Review since its origin, he served as president of the Western American Literature Association in 1971. His list of publications on Western and Midwestern literature is long and impressive. His critical articles appear regularly in bibliographies of regional, Western and Midwestern literature. In response to my query on Lois Hudson he said:

> sorry to say, I'm afraid that you won't find anything on Lois Phillips Hudson. For one thing, she hasn't written enough to attract critical attention. There are reviews of her two books, but I've never seen an article on her work . . . single novels do not generate much attention (Milton, 1974).

The above quote provides one explanation for Hudson's lack of a critical reputation. She is not prolific, and there has been scant attention paid to "'western' Midwestern" writers.

Her publisher writes that "The trade editions of both books sold almost 6000 copies. The Literary Guild edition of The Bones of Plenty sold 24,839 copies" (Greenberg, 1974). Both books are currently out of print and are available only through out-of-print book finders. It is very hard to get copies of The Bones of Plenty. The fact that the books are out of print, of course, limit the use of the books. Colleges that might be interested are restricted by the lack of available books from featuring her work in Midwestern or American Studies Programs. No complete record has been kept, but her short stories have been reprinted extensively, particularly in composition texts for college freshmen.[2]

A frequent complaint of both the creative and critical western and midwestern writers is that the publishing industry is concentrated in and concentrates on the East. The literary contributions from other areas of the United States are largely unsolicited and unwelcome. Alvin Josephy, an editor for American Heritage in an article published in Western American Literature reports,

> I am acutely aware that today the American Publisher, seemingly an Eastern- and European-oriented monopolist, is also considered something of an enemy of the West--not so much, perhaps because of overt hostility and sins of commission, but because of what appears to many persons to be a cold shoulder he gives to the West, to Western themes, and to Western writers (Josephy, 1967).

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[2]See Appendix A for a partial listing of reprintings.

He explains that the lack of interest in such material is excusable because the "Eastern editor and publisher who rejects Western manuscripts . . . is unfamiliar with the West" (Josephy, 1967, p. 263).

Vardis Fisher, writing in the same issue of Western American Literature emphasizes the point that the Eastern publisher is ignorant of the West, but he does not excuse the neglect.

> To bury most of the serious writing in the West by trying to discredit it, not with knowledge, of which they have too little, but with adolescent wit or malicious distortion, has been the objective of the Establishment's critics as far back as I have looked at the record (Fisher, 1967, p. 245).

Fisher advises those interested in writing about the West to "declare their independence of the emotionally immature, intellectually sterile, and morally bankrupt literary establishment in the Northeast . . ." (Fisher, 1967, p. 244).

In my research I found that a definite, consistent distinction between Western and Midwestern literature does not seem to exist. Critical articles in such reviews as the South Dakota Review, Rendezvous, Critique, and Western American Literature, tend to lump the two together. John R. Milton, past president of the Western American Literature Association, says that most of the W. A. L. membership call Willa Cather "Western." He adds that he does not; "her Nebraska novels are just as midwestern as The Bones of Plenty."

He suggests that:

> The problem here in the Dakotas is that we are in a transition zone having some characteristics of the Midwest and some of the West (Milton, 1974).

Hudson's work is a good example of what Milton calls "transition." Her work shares the characteristics of both areas. When asked if she

thought the subject matter and the setting of her novel conspired against the possibility of her work being more widely known, she answered, "It is the incredibly insular view of our own East Coast reviewers that limit novels such as mine" (Hudson, 1974a).

It appears that her opinion is shared by at least Josephy, Fisher and Milton. Fisher mentions that Leslie Fiedler thinks that "the basic tone of U. S. creative intellectual life has become Jewish." Fisher continues:

> I suspect that Western writers have about as much interest in Jewish moms and the tiresome trivia of Jewish family life as most Jewish book reviewers have in our magnificent mountains, rivers, valleys, and forests, or in the fact that this western part of our country is by far the most remarkable physical wonderland in the world. Those people back there, choking on their poisons, bathing in stinking water, and listening day and night to the infernal din of what Wolfe called their ant-swarms, can no more be expected to like our country or our books about it than I, to speak only for myself, can like the proliferating lunacies of their cities, the robotized togetherness of their feverish lives, and their dull, inbred, and overpraised books (Fisher, 1967, p. 253).

Fisher finally ends his article by asking, "Does our western land have the potential for great art?" He then answers his own question.

> More, I would think, than the East ever had; it is a more formidable country and demands more of those who occupy it. But it is true . . . that we have no big publishing centers out here, and that the nation's communications media are in the hands of aliens. We have a few good small publishers, galleries and museums, and some fine libraries, and the day may come when the West will have as much of these things as it needs. Since judges will always be among us, and the ablest of them are a necessary part of culture, the West needs its own, instead of book editors who are timid hacks waiting on the East's opinion of what is done out here, and then copying that opinion, or ignoring what is done if the East is silent (Fisher, 1967, p. 257-58).

John R. Milton in an article in South Dakota Review states the problem in another way.

> The serious novelist, whether he writes the historical novel, the autobiographical novel, the objective novel, or the contemporary

> novel, is concerned with the traditions of his region, with the physical aspects of the region, and with the ways in which the region affects those people living within it. This, I take it, is what every reputable novelist does. If, in so doing, he is able to delineate characters who can speak beyond the region, or if he can locate values which transcend the immediate area in which they originate, then his work has simply done what it ought to do. It must be a cliche by now that good literature is first regional and then universal. In the American novel, do we need to mention The Scarlet Letter, Moby Dick, Washington Square, Huck Finn, and The Grapes of Wrath to prove the point?
>
> . . . As the novel stands now, there are differences between the one written in the eastern or metropolitan area and the one written in the semi-arid lands of the western half of the U. S. These differences will not apply to every pair of novels from the two regions, but they indicate some means of making a psychological, social, or economic ordeal, with current affairs, and with a relationship in time rather than space because of the confinement of space in the East. The western novel is more often concerned with physical and anthropological matters, with characters related in space.
>
> . . . The eastern novel is based on sophistication and disillusionment. . . . The eastern novel is intensive, probing into the center of problems which are often small and temporary. The western novel is extensive, opening outward from character into action, racial consciousness, and the almost unlimited landscape. The eastern novel is dramatic; the western novel is epic, romantic, mythic, and lyrical. The eastern novel is a people-novel, while in the western novel Nature becomes an additional character or force. . . .
>
> All of which proves very little, perhaps, except that the continent on which we live is large enough to permit totally different landscapes and environments, and that the literature from the various areas will of course reflect that variety. When the professional critics, most of whom live in the East, recognize the simple fact, they may be able to strip away the long-imposed stereotyped notions and come to grips with western fiction. And when the learned professors follow suit, we may find more colleges and universities offering courses in Western American literature. In the meantime, quite apart from the critics and the British oriented professors, the American West is growing and maturing and producing a literature which is worthy of our serious attention (Milton, 1964, pp. 65, 75-76).

Almost ten years later Milton repeats the same complaint:

> The New York and Boston publishing houses are no longer interested in literature--they are interested only in sales, whatever that takes. Distribution from the heartland, or from the West, is next to impossible, and South Dakota Review must operate almost entirely on subscriptions by mail. . . . it continues to get top material from hundreds of writers in every part of the country. . . . I take

> delight in publishing a good story, for example, which has been totally rejected by the over-commercialized publications east of here (Milton, 1973, pp. 99-100).

If the argument that the Eastern Publishing Establishment hinders a Westerner or a Mid-westerner's chances for a national reputation by ignoring them is valid, it must still be remembered that Lois Hudson has produced and published a limited amount of fiction. As mentioned, her work is familiar to many Midwestern scholars, but, as it seems that Western and Midwestern studies is of relatively recent scholarly interest, it may be that her relative lack of production is a factor, and the work of those currently publishing is of the most obvious and evident interest.

There are many personal reasons, including a divorce, increased familial and financial responsibilities, extended illnesses, major surgery, and teaching loads which might help to explain why Ms. Hudson has not been writing for publication during the past twelve years. This fact should not, however, negate her outstanding, existing achievements. If even one work of art is produced, that fact should be duly noted and the artist paid his due. The contribution an author has already made should rather be applauded before the absence of continued work is denigrated. The artist ought not to be faulted for what he has not produced, but rather praised for what he has done. But, happily, it appears that she expects to publish a new novel in the foreseeable future; an excerpt is included as an appendix to this paper. Her comments about the novel on which she is currently at work follow:

> Specifically, in this book I wanted to find out how an educated man of deep sensitivities, in many ways, could participate in a massacre of harmless Indians. . . . There is no arguing the fact that such men DID massacre Indians, all over the country. I wanted to get to

> know the man. The massacre which happens at the end of the novel really happened in 1860 in Humboldt Bay. The Humboldt Times, which is still the voice of all of Humboldt County and the "Redwood Empire," came out with a front page editorial in large type, commending the patriotic citizens who exterminated the vermin. Bret Harte, who was temporarily editing a small paper in Arcata, seven miles away, came out with an issue expressing horror and disgust. . . . Harte was given 24 hours to get out of town, which he did. (One wonders how his literary career might have gone, had he stayed in Arcata longer.) Anyway, the point here is that we see which newspaper survived and grew in power! THE problem in my novel, then, is to portray a good Christian who had all of the overt racism of his time, and yet make him sympathetic to modern readers, who may be just as racist but who know now that it's wrong to say so, or even to feel so. And, of course, the novel is much more than one man and his wife, who comes to live with him in California. That State, I think most people agree, IS the culmination of THE AMERICAN DREAM, with all its hopes and all its atrocities. Most "educated" "sensitive" people today cannot believe that men who were educated at Harvard, who knew Latin and Greek, who loved the Romantic poets of their time, who were devout Christians, could believe and say and do the things they did. . . . I think we need to be reminded. . . . But of COURSE I don't want the novel to preach!!!! I want it to tell the story--to tell it in such a way that a contemporary reader cannot squirm away from it, no matter how much he might want to. To me, this is what good fiction does; maybe that's why a favorite word of critics is "compelling." It doesn't preach, but it DOES demand comprehension, insight, feeling, etc. I'm sure I don't need to say much more to give you an idea of what I have been struggling with--and, above all, as I said to you before, my own anger! And as Frederick Jackson Turner said, "The true epic of America is NOT the Civil War, but the westward expansion" . . . I believe this is true, and I have LONG believed that we have a great need for serious fiction about the West. It will take many good and honest books to offset, even a little, the Cowboy and Indian image with which all Western writers are saddled (excuse the pun!), and, above all, which oppresses Native Americans, and, by extension, all other Third World citizens. So this is what I hope and believe the book will do, when I get it into its final shape (Hudson, 1974c).

It is to be hoped that she can finish this novel on which she has been working intermittently for so many years. She writes that "this summer has been the first time that I have really been able to commit myself to the single-minded attention necessary to getting control of it" (Hudson, 1974c).

If her new novel is, and there is no reason to assume it will not be, of the same quality as her other published fiction, the critics may yet become familiar with the name Lois Phillips Hudson.

APPENDIX A

Bio-Bibliography

Lois Phillips Hudson--BIOGRAPHY, PUBLICATIONS[1]

Born August 24, 1927, Jamestown, North Dakota.
Married Randolph Hoyt Hudson 1951.
Mother of Laura (1955) and Lucy (1956).

Education

Lake Washington High School, 1945.

University of Puget Sound, A. B. 1949--graduated with general and special honors.

University of Washington, Summer 1949.

Cornell University--A.M., 1951--Old and Middle English, Medieval Literature (unpublished thesis: A Suggested Historical Setting for the Middle English Metrical Romance, King Horn).

Teaching Experience

English--Shelton Junior High School, 1949-1950.

English--Ithaca High School, 1951-1955.

Assistant Professor of English--North Dakota State University, 1967-1969.

University of Washington, 1969-

Professional Organizations

American Association of University Professors

International Platform Association

Professional Recognition, Awards

Doctor of Literature, North Dakota State University, 1965.

$1000 First Prize, Friends of American Writers, Chicago, 1963.

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[1]Information furnished by Lois Phillips Hudson.

Listed in Who's Who American Women; Who's Who in the West; Dictionary of International Biography.

Publications

The Bones of Plenty. Atlantic-Little, Brown, 1962.
Alternate selection of the Literary Guild Book Club.
Published in London for the United Kingdom by Heinemann, Inc., February 1964.

Reapers of the Dust. Atlantic-Little, Brown, 1965.
Christian Herald Family Reading Circle; Doubleday Book Club; ran serially in Canada; other book clubs.

STORIES

"The Dust Storm," The Reporter. April 4, 1957.

"The Cold Wave," The Reporter. February 6, 1958. Reprinted in Our Times; Writing from Observation; Cross Currents; Read and Write; How to Read and Write in College; Language, Form, and Ideas; plus several others.

"Children of the Harvest," The Reporter. October 16, 1958. Reprinted in Idea and Image; Essays Today; The Christian and the World; How to Read and Write in College; Counterpoint in Literature.

"The Water Witch," The Reporter. July 23, 1959. Reprinted in The New Basic Reader.

"Epitaph for a Lion," The New Yorker. February 6, 1960. Reprinted in Literary Cavalcade.

"Green Hay," The Reporter. July, 1962.

"Gopher Hunting," The Reporter. August 4, 1960.

"The Buggy on the Roof," The Atlantic Monthly. November, 1962.

"The Golden State," The Texas Quarterly. Winter 1962.

"Work for the Night is Coming," The Reporter. January 17, 1963.

"When the Fields are Fresh and Green," The Reporter. January 16, 1964. Reprinted in Writing to be Read.

"Other Time," The Texas Quarterly. Spring 1964.

(Note: This listing of reprintings is incomplete.)

ARTICLES

"The Big Rock Candy Mountain: No Roots--And No Frontier," South Dakota Review. 9 (Spring 1971): 3-13.

"Springtime in the Rockies," The Reporter. February 11, 1965.

"The Wasters," The Nation. May 17, 1965.

"Four-Lane Menace to California's Redwoods," The Reporter. August 12, 1965.

"The Benevolent Wreckers," The Nation. April 4, 1966.

"Another Give-Away?" The Colorado Quarterly. Autumn 1967.

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"Freedom," The Colorado Quarterly. Spring 1963.

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POETRY

"A Happening" and "Twenty Digits," Scopcraeft. 2 (October, 1967): 8, 10.

"Prairie," Poetry North. March, 1968, p. 8.

"Small Lot Owner," Scopcraeft. 4 (February, 1970): 29.

APPENDIX B

Excerpt from new novel

That it may please thee to give and preserve to our use the kindly fruits of the earth, so that in due time we may enjoy them:

We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord.

--The Anglican Litany

After the autumn world rolls away from the hungry fire of the sun, the long light of that vanished star still comes slanting, free and dying, to live its last strange life among the mountain peaks. This light is no longer accountable to its beginning, for it has been given by the sun to night, and it is free of all laws. It hides behind the western ridge while it gilds the river buried deep in the black valley. It marches the western summits backward against the flanks rising to the east, and with the shadows of the first column it cuts the crests from the second, loosing the burning crowns to fly lonely as comets above the dim course of the earth, to fly golden into the west.

Beneath the free dying light the golden peaks will sink again, sink even as once they rose up from the western sea, layered with treasure. God caused the peaks to rise up out of the formless world, and He caused the light to flame on their granite heads, and he kept the treasure hid until its chosen finders should come.

Now we are here, the appointed heirs, riding these darkened valleys below the flying peaks, riding deep under the dying light. We have been born, like this last light, to go free from our beginnings, to take up what we have not laid down, to reap what we have not sowed, to thrust in our sickles into the ripe harvest of the earth. Legions of us ride the world spinning out of this last light, looking up beyond the black forests buttressing these domes still blazing gold, looking for the sign that will lead us, tomorrow, to our inheritance.

Now the thousands of us begin our suppers, now that it is too dark, at last, to shovel, to tunnel, to pry with our knives at every glittering mote in every granite cliff. Now we build our ten thousand fires along the Trinity, still flowing golden in the darkness.

When the bread dough begins to fry, it squirms alive in the pan, but we no longer notice. Five ounces of gold for a flour barrel of weevils--but we watch the peaks, like Gideon. Like Gideon, wait for the sign at dawn. Every night we could scoop golden water in the buckets we fill all day with sand and sieve back into the river. And every morning the river runs green again.

The cliffs are marked, in this last light, with the golden edges of ancient rivers. Tomorrow, in the day's real light, the lines of gold will hide again in the red walls of the cliffs. But we know the veins are there; we have only to devour the mountains, drink the rivers, and we will have done what we were born to do. Every night we wait, like Gideon, for the sign God will send us in the dawn. We will be led to the spot where we will thrust in our shovels and find what has been saved for us. Tomorrow I will know where to dig, what place has waited for me.

How the earth flies along her vast ellipse! For a man who has never lived under mountains before, how swiftly the sun goes south. Every night it flares on a different summit, every night slides down a different notch. Every night we mark its hurrying along the brim of the world, and every night we know the snows come closer. The crickets are not so loud as they were a month ago, though the grasshoppers still sound even over the noise of the river in the hot day.

The day so hot and the river so cold. Peter and I--he dragging buckets of dirt, limping, heat-numb, I rocking buckets of dirt, my loins shrinking, my feet deader than the stones under my boots, river-numb. Today we washed two hundred buckets. Peter cannot stand in the river any more. All night he groans in his sleep from the rheumatism the river gave him. I listen to him cry in his sleep every night, and I don't even know his last name. That would have seemed a strange juxtaposition a year ago. Every morning I wake afraid to move my legs. But every morning they move me back to the river.

The last letter took only three months from Boston. She could be here in only three months--or I could be <u>there</u>. Now, with the sun long gone, she would be putting out the lamps, lighting the candle. And then her eyes lifting up to me, coming from the shadows to me as the gold shines in this dark river, and her thighs as warm as this melted-snow river is cold, and my unending hunger rising. If you had been born in another time, another place--how would we have found each other? And how would I believe in my own existence if you did not exist--and if I had not found you? Now I will deserve you. I will build you a castle--a castle in Boston. Tomorrow I will find it.

The fire is out--the one in the sky and the one here. I never got warm tonight after I came up from the river. All the wood is so far away. To walk up these cliffs after wood with my legs, or Peter's, at the end of the day--this is to crawl, every night, the first terrace of Purgatory. Another thing about mountains--days hot, nights cold. The candle will do. Peter already asleep, stomach full of dough and weevils. This pencil must be sharpened, careful with the knife, my last pencil.

October 19, 1850

My Dear Wife:

Today was quite lucrative, though my partner and I expect to dig into the real wealth of our new claim within the next few days, having produced, today, a hole which would easily serve for the burial of a mule team. I am well, and hope this finds you the same. Your last letter took just short of three months to reach me--88 days, to be exact. We hear from the new arrivals that the Isthmus crossing is not quite so time-consuming as it has been, and there are always steamers at Panama now, so that the long wait in that city of pestilence is no longer a necessity. The mail service between Panama and San Francisco is now excellent, with several fast ships under contract to the Government. The steamers come on up the coast and dock once every fortnight, when the weather permits, at Humboldt Bay, which is some 300 miles north of the Golden Gate. Then the mail must be packed on mule-back over the mountains to our new "Diggings" here on the Trinity River at Lottery Bar--yes that <u>is</u> its name! When it finally arrives in Weaverville, a full-fledged "city" which has a long history of at least ten months, (!) you can be sure those villainous packers make us pay! But what is an ounce of dust for a letter from home!

The mountains are even more rugged here than they were in the "Mother Lode" country. I wish you could see the sunset here. "Old Sol" treats us to a real "spectacle" almost every evening. The nights are getting chilly. I am going to have to part with a few ounces of dust for another blanket.

I will say good-night now, and hope to find time to add to this tomorrow before I make my Sunday trip into town and catch the drunken

packers before they rouse themselves to start back to the Coast. They passed above us on the cliff trail this afternoon, but we know, by now, that they obstinately refuse to unpack when they are this close to town. They delight in shouting that most magic of words, "Mail!" as they pass, but they do not stop until they reach their goal--the noisome flesh-pots of Weaverville. Today they were much too far away to be heard, but from the amount of arm-waving we saw, there must be mail. A letter from you?

Tomorrow you will rise and dress in your best and go to church, and I, Dearest Laura, never fear that your bearded and long-haired husband has become the heathen he looks like! I worship as best I can in this Godless place. And always I give thanks for His gifts to us all--for my health, for bringing me to His bounty here in the mountains, and, most of all, for my Dearest Wife. . . .

My teeth ached all day today. That's the first sign. I know I have to eat something fresh, something raw, but where will I get it? These pitiful Indians have long since gathered and dried all the berries to be found on these parched hillsides--and even if there are still some left, I mustn't take the time to hunt for them. I could buy a basket of dried berries, but they have found out how much the traffic will bear. They may be slow-witted, but they are cunning. Almost as clever as the packers. The packers might have a half-withered, half-rotted apple they would sell me for two or three dollars. An apple, an apple--my jaws cramp when I think about an apple. The most brainless sailor would mutiny if he were made to sail around the Horn without his lime juice. And then he will desert his ship in San Francisco and come up here to

die of scurvy. And I--I am more foolish than that brainless sailor. Today the smell of a bit of green grass in the shade of a dry manzanita--I wanted to chew it, like a wild beast, my mouth dripping spit. Even potatoes, even potatoes. But if I buy potatoes I cannot buy new boots, and then I cannot stand in the river.

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