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ROBIN HYDE: A WRITER AT WORK

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL  
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
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ABSTRACT

Robin Hyde's novels explore the nature of individual identity and its relationship to a wider social context. Fictional forms in which to embody this preoccupation were created with a great deal of care and thought. The novels themselves, some letter collections and a number of previously unexamined manuscripts, including several unpublished works, are used in order to investigate that creative process. Relationships between the novels are clarified by the presence of this material. It also makes possible a more precise formulation of Hyde's aesthetic principles. The manuscripts are a valuable source, both because of their various formal experiments and their thematic congruity with the published work. Since many of them are as yet unrecorded, an annotated list of all the ones used or seen in the course of this research is given in an Appendix.

One of the defining characteristics of Hyde's work is an interest in biography and autobiography. It is explored here in a variety of forms. Far from indicating a "journalistic" shortcoming—an inability to rise imaginatively above the raw materials of her art—her use of these genres is innovative and reflects the most fundamental aspects of her belief in the nature and function of art.

Having established in general terms the nature of Hyde's moral vision and the stylistic basis of its presentation, the central part of the thesis consists of a reading of *The Godwits Fly*. Its origin

in an early autobiography is established. The process by which this material was refined and developed into its fictional form is then examined at length. The novel's central theme of the growth of individual identity is observed, and along with that the emergence of a style founded as much on the "poetic" techniques of imagism and the creation of symbolic structures as on the devices of naturalism. A close reading of the novel, supported by evidence from the stages of its composition, establishes that it is a structurally complete fictional unit rather than the open-ended report on experience which it appears to be on casual inspection.

The exploration of the origins and nature of individual identity in *The Godwits Fly* clarifies the themes and techniques of the later works. These place individual identity within a wider context. They look outward, beyond introspection, towards a larger community which is variously defined as the nation and the international community in a political sense, or the community of human feeling in a spiritual sense. The value of Hyde's novels depends, finally, on the skill of a writer whose work is controlled, purposeful and rarely shows signs of the effort she put into its creation.

PREFACE

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- (i) The following abbreviations are used to refer to the specified editions of those of Hyde's published works which are frequently cited in this thesis:

AHITW: *A Home In This World*. Introd. Derek Challis. Auckland: Longman Paul, 1984.

CTYK: *Check to Your King*. New Zealand Classics Series. Auckland: Golden Press, 1975.

DR: *Dragon Rampant*. Introd. Derek Challis, crit. note Linda Hardy. Auckland: New Women's Press, 1984.

HBTS: *Houses By The Sea and the Later Poems of Robin Hyde*. Ed. and introd. Gloria Rawlinson. Christchurch: The Caxton Press, 1952.

NYC: *Nor The Years Condemn*. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1938.

PTH: *Passport to Hell*. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1936.

TGF: *The Godwits Fly*. Ed. and introd. Gloria Rawlinson. 2nd ed. 1970; rpt. Auckland: Auckland University Press and Oxford University Press, 1974.

WC: *Wednesday's Children*. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1937.

- (ii) The following standard library abbreviations are used to refer to the libraries in which archive material is held:

AP: Auckland Public Library, Auckland.

AU: Auckland University Library, Auckland.

WTu: Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.