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ROBIN HYDE: A WRITER AT WORK

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH AT
MASSEY UNIVERSITY

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1985

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 The novels themselves, some letter collections and a number of previously unexamined manuscripts, including several unpublished works, are used in order to investigate that creative process.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

The writing of this thesis has been assisted and encouraged by many people, to whom I gratefully express my thanks:

To Mr Derek Challis for his permission to copy and use Hyde's manuscripts, for his advice and encouragement and for the hospitality which both he and his wife Lynne extended to me; to Miss Gloria Rawlinson, for her practical and kindly assistance in using Hyde's manuscripts; to Mr H.O. Roth, former Head Librarian of Auckland University Library, for permission to use and photocopy Hyde's manuscripts in the library; to Mr J.E. Traue, Chief Librarian of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, for permission to use archive material relating to Hyde and her contemporaries; to the staffs and librarians of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, General Assembly Library, Wellington, Auckland University Library, Auckland Public Library and Massey University Library, for their cooperation in helping me to use their collections; to Messrs A.P. Watt and Son, London, for permission to photocopy and use material from their archives; to Professor D.I.B. Smith who shared with me his experience of using Hyde's manuscripts relating to *Passport to Hell*; to Mr and Mrs L. Osborne and Ms J. Haynes who gathered information for me in Britain; to Dr W.S. Broughton and Dr J.D. Needham who supervised the writing of the thesis; to the late Professor R.G. Freen whose kindness and support will not be forgotten; to Dr D.H. Dowling for his help with organising early drafts; to Dr J. Muirhead for his practical

help at every stage from gathering materials in Britain to proof-reading; to Dr G.D. Crossan and Dr J.C. Ross who both assisted with bibliographical matters; and to the other members of the Department of English at Massey University who gave me their support and encouragement.

Financial assistance for the research came from a University Grants Committee Scholarship, 1979-81 and from Massey University in the form of research grants from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Fund, Humanities Dean's funds and English Department funds in 1978-80.

For the skill and dedication she brought to the task of typing the thesis I wish especially to thank Mrs Valerie Oram.

Finally, and most personally, I wish to thank my parents and family for their support and patience. To my wife Catherine I offer my gratitude for sharing the load.

Patrick Sandbrook

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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.