



The Bones of Plenty

Lois Phillips Hudson

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Lois Phillips Hudson eloquently portrays George Custer, a determined and angry man who must battle both the land and the landlord; his hard-working wife Rachel; and their young and vulnerable daughter Lucy. Through their compelling story looms a sense of a whole nation's tragedy during the Great Depression.

Reviews of The Bones of Plenty:

"It is possible . . . that literary historians of the future will decide that *The Bones of Plenty* was the farm novel of the Great Drought of the 1920s and 1930s 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 that closed thousands of rural banks and drove farmers off their farms, the hopes and savings of a lifetime in ruins about them."--New York Times Book Review

"Hudson does a superb job of revealing the physical texture of farm life on the prairie--its sounds, smells, colors, sensations. Then she goes further, examining the spiritual texture as well. Her characters are bound to each other and to their land in a kind of harsh intimacy from which there is no relief. Weather, poverty, anger, and pride are the forces that drive them and ultimately wear them down. . . Like the best books of any era, it convinces us of its characters' enduring humanity, and surprises us, again and again, with the depth of emotion it makes us feel."--Minneapolis Star Tribune

"At her best, Lois Phillips Hudson can make the American Ordeal of the 1930s so real that you can all but feel the gritty dust in your teeth."--Omaha World-Herald

The Bones of Plenty Details

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From Reader Review The Bones of Plenty for online ebook

Janet says

This was a good read and a little bit of a downer. I was really drawn in by the writer and the characters. I hated some and cheered on others. I developed an appreciation of farm life during the dust bowl years.

Scott says

I think maybe my expectations were too high: I thought It was to be one of the key novels about plains farming during the depression and dust bowl. Maybe I have read so many books about his subject, but I found myself skinning towards the end, and not slowing down as I do on really excellent books.

One thing is for sure, the author made me truly uncomfortable with George's anger and paranoia. I didn't care for how she left the Stuart/Annie/Rose story line (they weren't even mentioned at the sale?).

Carol Wagers says

Reading about the depression is depressing! This is an excellent book for understanding what our ancestors went through in the Dust Bowl, the Bank Crisis, and the Great Depression. Well written, easy to read, just not a cheery book: kind of reminded me of the Joads in "Grapes of Wrath" just not set in the south. This book is set in the Dakotas where the blowing soil blacks out the sun

Glady says

Bones of Plenty is a painful read because the struggles of the simple, hardworking farmers trapped in the midst of the Dust Bowl are so honestly presented. The writing is gorgeous with the characters struggling through the quiet desperation of events out of their control.

Perhaps the most difficult task that George and his family face is the loss of connection to their past. Losing their farm means abandoning not only a view of a future but also the cadence of their history.

The struggles of ordinary Americans during the Great Depression has been documented many times. Bones of Plenty is a worthy companion to Steinbeck.

Crizzle says

A must-read for Dakotans! ND high schools should require this over The Grapes of Wrath, in my opinion

(however, the latter was an appropriate choice for my high school, in Bakersfield, CA). Tells the story of a family trying to make it wheat farming during the Great Depression of the 'dirty thirties'. It was hard to read at times; little Lucy's tale was at times just heart-breaking for me. Her father is proud, hard-working, angry and stubborn, and reminds me of my own Dakotan dad. I felt lazy for lying on the couch and reading while they toiled away for pennies, so it took a long time to read!

I wish I could find out what happened to Lucy; how she came to terms with her identity as a tomboy and what she did with her life.

Glen says

A depression era novel that reminds me how little my generation knows about hard times. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck tells the story of the dust bowl farmers who uprooted their lives and their families to look for opportunities elsewhere. *The Bones of Plenty* tells the story of the other people. The ones who stayed and tried to carve a living out of the land that they loved. A hard to find novel by a homegrown North Dakota author.

Kathleen Hagen says

The Bones of Plenty, by Lois Phillips Hudson. Recorded by the North Dakota Library for the Blind and available for persons who are blind through the National Library Service program.

This book narrates two years, 1933 and 1934, in the lives of George and Rachel Custer, their little girl, and Rachel's parents and brother who live on a nearby farm. George Custer, (named for the first Custer) shares some characteristics. He is impatient, brash, is very proud and angers quickly. We see George first as a brash but good farmer who has taken land badly farmed, and put it in decent shape over a ten-year period. However, the crops fail, or when they prosper, the prices go down. There is friction between the townspeople and the farmers. And, most of all, there is the continual dust. Hudson describes in detail people having to face the dirt with handkerchiefs tied on that immediately become filled with dust. George would come into the house, remove his boots and socks and pour dust out of them. Rachel has to sweep the house several times a day, and pound the dust out of the bedclothes and mattress daily. But things finally come to a crisis when George goes to see the landlord to try to work out a better deal for himself for the next year. The landlord, not at all considering any of the improvements George has made over the years, tells him to take or leave the current lease. George tears it up, and at the end of the book they are selling all their goods for little or nothing to embarrassed neighbors and getting ready to move west. It's a heart-rending and very descriptive book. I could see the Custer family moving on from North Dakota to the kind of life described in "*Grapes of Wrath*" by John Steinbeck.

Rey Dekker says

excellent book compared with *Grapes of Wrath* and I found this to be more readable and poignant. Perhaps the fact that it is set in The Dakotas gives it more relevance to me than a bunch of Okies riding in a jalopy to

CA but I always did find Steinbeck writing a tad clumsy. Was referred to this book by another good one, Dakota: A Spiritual by Kathleen Norris <http://books.google.com/books/about/D...>

Larry says

This is an historical novel about the "dirty 30's" in North Dakota. It takes place in Stutsman County which is just east of Kidder County where your great grandparents homesteaded. The family in the story are German; your ancestors were Norwegian/Swede. George Custer is a bit caustic, your ancestors were more optimistic. Yet they did go through those terrible times and George Dahlstrom walked away from his homestead which b y then was a large farm, giving it to the County for back taxes and moved to Appleton, MN in 1944.

They had 18 years of no crop or very poor crop!

A special part of this story is Lucy, a young girl. Through her you experience what it must have been like be a girl in the harshness of homestead life.

A must read to know something about your family history.

Becky says

Kathleen Norris who wrote Dakota recommended this book saying it was better than the Grapes of Wrath but little know. She was absolutely right. Incredible read of the Drepression years in North Dakota. So well written the characters come alive. Affected me profoundly. I wish she had written many more books.

Kbreach says

Well I slogged through to the end.... Not quite sure why, except that it was a bookclub book and I feel too guilty if I don't finish one of those.

Turns our most of my club ditched this one somewhere in the middle.

It started out ok but then just got too depressing. No redeeming qualities in the characters .

Here's what I shared with the bookclub gals:

Bones of plenty

Some of my ancestors homesteaders on the North Dakota prairie in the 1890s... Just 35 years before this books time frame. I could easily picture my great great grandparents going through many of the same motions described in this book. I have heard stories about grandma picking the bugs off the potatoes just like Lucy did. And the butchering day Spot on .

I appreciate how the author captured the loneliness and isolation on the prairie. Having lived up there for a year myself when mike was on vicarage (like student teaching for pastors) and now out here in the constantly windy wheaton area, it doesn't take much imagination to see how the dust bowl could happen...

The strategically planted long rows of trees between the fields to slow erosion stand as silent barriers against time and nature .

I am really glad we (well, ME at least, seeing as how I was the only one who actually finished it) read Franklin and Eleanor before reading this one ... The very thorough historical context helped me read this novel with a stronger perspective of the whys behind the hows (bank closings, etcetera...)

I really enjoyed this book at first but as it went on and on it got kind of depressing. wonder if anybody else felt that way? But it was probably a pretty accurate account of those depression years (yes, terrible pun intended, but not in a humorous way).

Jan says

My Bluestockings book club discussed this book on Saturday, and Hudson's portrayal of the difficult life of North Dakota farmers in 1933-34 received high marks. Her commitment to historical veracity in terms of the political climate, the crisis in agriculture due not only to the drought but also the manipulation of prices on a national and international level, and the desperation of farmers losing their livelihoods raises the importance of this gripping novel to an important level. It is iconic in the same way that John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath" has become. The trials and experiences of the nine-year-old girl, Lucy, reminded me of some other remarkable studies of children in other great novels: Scout, Pip, Mary Lennox, David Copperfield, Huck Finn, and, most recently, Abdullah in "And the Mountains Echoed."

Michele McKenna says

Excellent

This is a terrific novel that deals with the great depression in the dust bowl. The story revolves around one family farm and the town they live in. I learned so much about a subject I thought I understood. Once again I am reminded of the adversity people have gone through and how proud I am to be an American.

Crystal says

Another North Dakota book everyone should read

Alison says

Hudson is listed as one of the top 10 authors from ND at "Read North Dakota." But.... I can't get through it. Will try again another time. Reader fail.
