

Adele Wiseman wrote very few books. *Crackpot*, written in 1974, and *The Sacrifice*, which won the author the Governor General's Award in 1956, are her only adult novels.

Crackpot is a classic novel of Adele Wiseman. The main character, to quote Margaret Laurence, "is one of the greatest characters in our literature".

Hoda is the daughter of Jewish Russian immigrants living in Winnipeg's North End. Her parents were married in Russia when the plague (cholera) was rampaging through the country. There was a belief that if two people who were disabled (either mentally or physically) were married in the Jewish cemetery the plague would be halted. Hoda's mother, Rahel, had a slight hump and her father, Danile, was blind so they were the chosen two and the village promised to support them in return.

The plague in fact did stop although Danile's own mother died of it. However, soon enough the village grew tired of supporting them and Danile's uncle in Winnipeg agreed to sponsor them to come to Winnipeg. The uncle was not aware that Danile was blind and he was not pleased to have a family with no way of earning a living to support. Rahel started cleaning houses to earn their keep and Rahel, Danile and Hoda (just a baby when they left Russia) moved into a rundown shack.

Rahel would take Hoda with her when she worked and to keep her quiet she fed her all the time. Hoda was a fat infant who grew into a fat young girl of whom other children made fun. When Hoda was still quite young, Rahel died of cancer thus taking the

family's sole source of income away. Danile's uncle decided that the best way of supporting them would be to donate large sums to the Jewish orphanage and Old Folks Home and have Hoda move into the orphanage and Danile move into the seniors' home. Hoda and Danile refused to be separated and the uncle washed his hands of them.

Meanwhile, Danile had started to learn how to do basket weaving before Rahel's death and he felt he could continue to do that at home to support Hoda and himself. However, the basket weaving didn't bring in much money. Hoda started to clean houses to earn some money too but there was never enough. The local butcher gave Hoda scraps of meat if she would touch his penis and cause him to ejaculate. It was not far from that to Hoda having sex with young men for payment.

She was so innocent that she thought she could not get pregnant from that because she was not having intercourse with just one man. Of course, the inevitable happened and she did get pregnant but she didn't realize she was pregnant. One night she woke from sleep with labour pains and she gave birth by herself without even waking her father. The baby boy was alive so Hoda decided to take him to the Jewish orphanage to which her uncle had donated so much money. She left a note that led people to think the child was the illegitimate offspring of the Prince of Wales who had visited Winnipeg at the appropriate time.

The story continues with the lives of Hoda, Danile and Hoda's son, David (also called Pipick because of his out-turned belly button that resulted from Hoda's inexpert tying of the umbilical cord).

The story in Winnipeg starts before the First World War and continues past World War II. Hoda is a witness and participant in the Winnipeg General Strike and her involvement with the Communist Party continues. Thus the novel is also a revelation of the Jewish experience in the North End of Winnipeg as well as an exploration of

Hoda's unusual lifestyle. Hoda talks quite frankly about her work, but she persists in keeping her father unaware of it. Danile really was not that innocent or if he just chose to ignore it. Hoda also talks frankly about being fat, a point of view that is seldom dealt with in literature, particularly not with the acceptance that is so obvious.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CRACKPOT

This novel has many shocking moments that would have made the book impossible to publish had it not been written by an already established writer. Crackpot's central character, Hoda, is a prostitute, and the story is a light hearted look at how someone who is in the lower classes of society can be just as happy as the richest people who purchase her services.

The plot points that push this story along are unforgettable. Among them: a preteen Hoda giving the butcher a hand job to get some extra scraps of meat, then forced to lick the consequences off her hand; a young teen Hoda giving birth in her sleep after not knowing she was pregnant, then chewing the umbilical cord off; and, last but not least, the climactic scene when Hoda's son, David, purchases his mother's services without either of them knowing their relation. But these scenes aside, this is a very happy and light hearted story.

Hoda is a legend in her community, everyone who is anyone knows Hoda, the fat prostitute, and has paid for the pleasure of her company. In between these shocking scenes we see the loving story of how Hoda struggles and does what is needed to take care of her blind father. We see that happiness is possible after this hard type of life. Each of the three scenes afore mentioned takes the story into a new direction. Hoda starts hooking to survive, she continues hooking to take care of her "daddy," she stops hooking (for the most part) as she sees how this has affected other people and there is more out there. She gets a good job, and a marriage proposal. All's well that ends well.

The style is intensely Jewish. Wiseman, herself a very devout Jew, uses sentence structure that is common amongst Yiddish immigrants. The conversational, backwards syntax. It is a similar