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## **Love and Duty by Judith Henry Wall (review)**

Dorys Crow Grover

Western American Literature

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REVIEW

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### **In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

174 Western American Literature Keep the Change. By Thomas McGuane. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin/Seymour Lawrence, 1989. 230 pages, \$18.95.) This is Thomas McGuane's best book. Joe Starling, Jr., is an American drifter and artist with a modicum of talent and a paucity of vision who labors under the ghost of his father, and whose life is empty for no reason. Whether it is success as an artist, craftsman, cowboy, or lover, everything pales by comparison to Joe's expectations because he is a total devotee of his own self-absorbed brand of infinite possibility. He bounces back and forth among Montana, Florida, and New York City without ever fully realizing that individual human meaning is something we create rather than search for. What makes this novel remarkably good is that McGuane's own vision has continued to deepen toward wisdom. While there is plenty of humor, nothing is less than three dimensional, almost nothing is played for easy laughs. Our sympathies are with everybody. McGuane demonstrates his continually developing post-macho awareness by delivering three women characters who are more than a match for his protagonist, and by totally eschewing comic violence. Violence here is real and, because it is real, completely bewildering

and dehumanizing. And McGuane does not opt for easy solutions to the confusion of life in our time. Love and the land should be enough to settle any lonesome cowboy down, but only as the story ends does Joe begin to vaguely understand what it means to give rather than receive love. And, sadly, Joe does not understand that the West is his blood's country. Even though contemporary Montana—complete with golf and credit-card buffalo hunting—is no romantic embodiment of manifest destiny, it is at least the one place where Joe Starling can come closest to creating his own meaning. The best news about this book is that Thomas McGuane has remained true to himself. At a time when the exigencies of his career—he is one of our most critically valued writers although he has never achieved best sellerdom—might dictate a flabby big book aimed mindlessly at the mainstream, he has delivered an American story tightly told, lean and hard and literate. And that sort of self-reliance is the best lesson for readers in this or any other American century.

DEXTER WESTRUM *Ottawa University Love and Duty*. By Judith Henry Wall. (New York: Viking, 1988. 498 pages, \$19.95.) After I had finished this novel I thought there ought to have been a better title. It might sell better with a more enticing title, but then I could not think of a title that fits this long novel better than *Love and Duty*. Three young women are the center of this book, and their love and duty is what the story is about. It is interesting that love does not always come first. The novel follows the lives of three women from pre-World War II to the 1970s, beginning with their years growing up in the tightly knit German community of New Braunfels, Texas, when they yearn for something more than the lives their mothers lead on the farms where they live. Kate, red-haired and rambunctious, vows no man will ever tie her down and dreams of being Texas's top woman athlete. Effie (a cousin) is the golden girl who marries and fulfills her dream. The novel centers on Stella, the dark-haired student who has dreams of becoming a true scholar and teacher, but like her sister, Kate, she marries and children become the focus of her life. All three of the women go through periods of trial, loneliness, hope, and fear, and as one follows their lives through this long, romantic novel, one realizes that the author has touched on truth in portraying the lives of the three women. Members of the family die, are killed in war, are disappointed, and otherwise suffer many of the ordinary vicissitudes of life. Always the women long for time for themselves. The novel ends as it opens, with the remaining sisters (Effie dies of cancer) sitting on a rail fence at...

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