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Review of *Harvest of Opportunity: New Horizons for Farm Women*, by Lois L. Ross

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He also points out (as have certain other authors studying other grasses) that many of the terms that are customarily used to describe the grass inflorescence are not technically correct. The whole inflorescence, since it blooms from the top down and from the outside in, should be considered "cymose" rather than "paniculate," and the small inflorescence unit that is normally called a "spikelet," should probably be called a "cymelet," since, in Raju's interpretation, its development is more similar to that of a small scorpioid cyme (as in the Borage family) than it is to that of a small spike.

Raju also offers an unusual assessment of the wild oat embryo. He agrees with most morphologists that the scutellum (the suctorial organ which carries nutrients from the endosperm to the embryo) is homologous to the single cotyledon of other monocots but states that the first leaf arises precisely opposite the scutellum and should therefore be regarded as a second cotyledon. Thus, in Raju's view, the wild oat may be added to the growing list of monocots with dicotyledonous embryos.

This work will appeal to the grass specialist and others with an interest in evolutionary interpretations of anatomical structures. A minor criticism is that many of the drawings and photographs would have been more intelligible if printed larger. The text also contains some unnecessary repetition of information and a small number of printer's and proof-reader's errors. **David M. Sutherland**, *Department of Biology, University of Nebraska-Omaha*.

Harvest of Opportunity: New Horizons for Farm Women. Lois L. Ross. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1990. Bibliography. viii + 164 pp. \$16.95 paper (ISBN)88833-311-0).

Journalist Lois Ross has organized interviews with twenty-four contemporary farm women of the Canadian prairie provinces into four categories of women's entrepreneurship in the face of the farm crisis of the 1980s. With only a six-page introduction to the volume and briefer chapter prefaces, it is in many ways a book ready to be written. The author defended the interviews, edited only for length and redundancy, in the same ways I have often argued for "qualitative" research in saying that the words of the women themselves speak better to the "feelings or frustrations, apprehension or optimism, barriers and breakthroughs" than statistical information does. Yet the book left me wanting some analysis, or at least a summary chapter.

Although Ross divided the book into four sections, "From Field to Storefront," "On Farm Enterprises," "Toward Community and Beyond,"

and "Cultivating Agrarian Alternatives," the stories within each section differ as much from each other as they do from those in other sections. That speaks not so much as a failure in organization as in the complexity and multifaceted labor and responsibilities of farm women's lives. Most of the women in the first grouping have taken jobs in town to supplement farm income, but one manufacturer of scarves also runs a guest farm and hosts country feasts on her Alberta farm. The second group runs cottage industries on the farm, either because they do considerable agricultural work as well or because they have small children. But the travel consulting, catering, drafting, and wheat weaving enterprises take them to town as well. But then so does the work of "unemployed" farm women who run to town continually for machine parts or veterinary supplies and buy groceries while they're at it. The interviews in the community section differ not so much in the work women do (computer vendor, teacher, hospital worker, co-op supervisor, student, and/or farmer), but in the concern they express for the future of rural communities with dwindling populations as women depend more on them for their livelihoods, on lack of social services as the demand for crisis intervention increases, and on the need for more volunteer activities as the same time women necessarily devote more of their time to paid labor.

Perhaps the final section on agrarian alternatives comes closest to the promise of the title. The seven women in this section have developed their own sheep flocks, started truck farms, greenhouses, and a duck farm, or a "vacation" farm. But, oddly, the last story is by a woman who farms in a business parallel to her husband's, but is, in her words, "angry and resentful" about her lack of title to the land.

In the end, the new horizons these women share are not so much new economic opportunities forced by changing circumstances as the implicit rise of feminist consciousness about the plight of rural women. The threads that tie this book together are the limitations of the Canadian Homestead Act to women's original ownership, the importance of dower rights in terms of bankruptcy proceedings, the double edge of women's inability to get credit when they do not own the land but credit review boards' accusations that they are the source of credit problems, and discrimination against women in obtaining their own insurance policies. Despite the hopefulness and resourcefulness of these prairie women, the book is fundamentally about complex roles and unequal statuses.

• And that does need further analysis. Otherwise we are left with the same old contradictions about whether farm women are harder working or more dependent, more traditional or more flexible than their urban or male counterparts. The introduction to the storefront section notes "because men see their roles as farmers, many feel that time spent generating off-farm income is wasted. They report higher stress levels even

when their off farm hours are low. In contrast, 75 percent of the women surveyed said they would keep their off-farm jobs regardless of economic necessity" (p. 8). But the woman with the computer business and the part-time job at the post office reported: "Farm women go through the same stress as farm men because the farm means co-working. There's no way that a farm is run by one person. The man from the debt review board wanted our records. And he said to me, 'You realize that usually when I get through these records it's mainly the wife's fault because she hasn't understood—when times are tough she hasn't tightened her belt'" (p. 90).

We are left wondering whether women are pursuing models of economic diversification, harvesting opportunities for themselves during a period of dramatic change, or whether, once more, women are just doing whatever they can to "help out" when the day, or the season, or the era puts extraordinary demands on the lives of farmers, in North America and everywhere. **Katherine Jensen**, *Department of Sociology, University of Wyoming*.

The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture. James R. Shortridge. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1989. Maps, charts, illustrations, notes, and bibliography. xiv + 201 pp. \$25.00 cloth (ISBN 0-7006-0475-8).

Fuzzy words facilitate colloquial discourse. They are useful because we all think we know what they mean, even though we would not be able to agree on a standard definition. For example, we all are sure we understand such words as "rural" or "place" or "landscape," but we come a cropper when we try to define them sharply and precisely enough to enable us to use them as analytical tools. Regions are equally fuzzy, and perhaps they are best left that way. Everyone has a sense of New England, or the South, or the West, but when we try to define these areas precisely we realize that they have different connotations for different people.

James R. Shortridge has cheerfully pursued the will-o'-the-wisp of trying to describe the "idea" of the Middle West in a book that was given the prestigious John Brinkerhoff Jackson Prize of the Association of American Geographers in 1990. He argues that a careful reading of the kinds of popular publications that are indexed in the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* can reveal the personality and image of the region, what it originally meant to Americans, and how this meaning has changed over time. Attempts to find meaning in places and things currently seem to be fashionable. Such efforts can be entertaining mental exercises, but all too often they tell us more about the author and his or her mindset than they tell us about the place or thing.