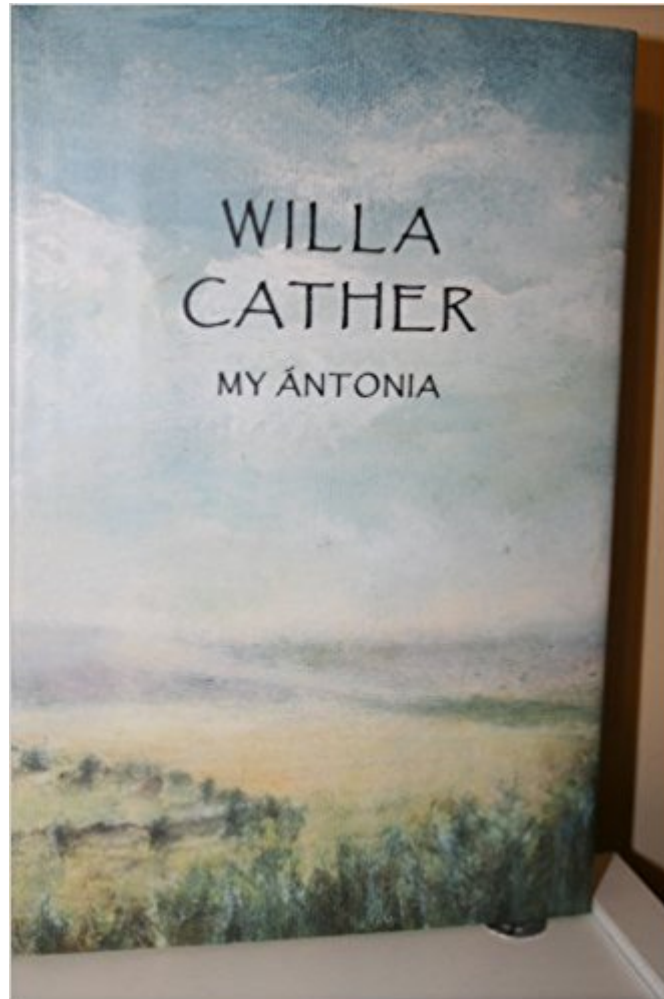




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My Antonia



Synopsis

Part of a special series honoring Willa Cather published by Book of the Month Club in 1995.

Book Information

Hardcover: 419 pages

Publisher: Book-Of-The-Month Club; 1st edition (1995)

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Customer Reviews

Part of a special series honoring Willa Cather published by Book of the Month Club in 1995.

I can't think of another novel that captures the time and place as well as Cather's *My Antonia*. It's a wonderful story of an immigrant family settling in Nebraska, and the travails of the displacement and the introduction to the hardscrabble life of midwestern winters and poverty in the late 1800s. The writing is simple and utterly compelling -- direct but authoritative. Her ability to describe landscape is distinctive and extraordinary.

This is a wonderful story of lives long ago that came together because of certain circumstances. It is also importantly historical and tells of hardships, joy, relationships and families in a harsh environment that few can fathom today. The story was delightful to read, especially for one who came to the Midwest as a twelve year old German girl, who had to learn a new language, new customs, and make new friends.

"Her warm, sweet face, her kind arms, and the true heart in her; she was, oh, she was still my Antonia!" These are the words of narrator Jim Burden, a few years younger than his childhood friend, as they reconnect before he moves on with his college studies. Willa Cather weaves an engaging story of numerous characters. She saves her best for Antonia. This may be Cather's finest work, written masterfully in describing the Nebraska settlers in the 2nd half of the 19th century.

Antonia has great self-confidence, strength, love of neighbor, and faithful friendship. She and all the settlers have to endure hardships which Cather fully develops. Some years later Jim returns for a visit. They quickly re-establish their deep friendship. Antonia says, "Ain't it wonderful, Jim, how much people can mean to each other?" Upon leaving, he writes, 'We reached the edge of the field, where our ways parted. I took her hands and held them against my breast, feeling once more how strong and warm and good they were, those brown hands, and remembering how many kind things they had done for me. I held them now a long while, over my heart. About us it was growing darker and darker, and I had to look hard to see her face, which I meant always to carry with me; the closest, realest face, under all the shadows of women's faces, at the very bottom of my memory.' He reflects later, "Some memories are realities, and are better than anything that can ever happen to one again." His final visit to her takes place when she has 'ten or eleven' healthy, happy children on the farm with her husband, Anton. At first she doesn't recognize Jim. He stays and enjoys the love and friendship of her large family. He visits their old childhood play places before heading back to his work. His reflections are poignant. I believe this book is another of Cather's loving testament to the pioneers of America, especially the women, some no doubt as remarkable as Antonia. Readers like me, with a rural or small town background, likely will take away a special pleasure in her words. But anyone with an interest in the deep and noble character values of people should enjoy this book. Thanks for making it available.

I remember years ago (over 60 years ago) being told by an English teacher that this was a wonderful book. For some strange reason I came across it on Kindle, read it in 2 days and it has to be one of my favorite books ever. I've ordered several other novels by Willa Cather and I'm sure they will also become favorites. The English had Jane Austen and we Americans had Willa Cather.

This is the novel that called me to be a writer. There's an honesty in the characters as they faced daily hardships as immigrants in the development of our immigrant nation. Willa Cather sets light to these fictional pioneer families that seem so real against the backdrop of the remote prairie town of Black Hawk, Nebraska, "buried in wheat and corn, under stimulating extremes of climate: burning summers when the world lies green and billowy beneath a brilliant sky, when one is fairly stifled in vegetation, in the colour and smell of strong weeds and heavy harvests; blustery winters with little snow, when the whole country is stripped bare and grey as sheet-iron. We agreed that no one who had not grown up in a little prairie town could know anything about it. It was a kind of free-masonry, we said".

This was a fascinating book. The story of two people who were brought to the Great Plains as children and grew up and moved away from each other, but remained connected even when they did not see each other for many years. It was the story of a girl brought to this country so that her brother could benefit from the "streets of gold" which turned out to be made of clay.

An old classmate recommended this novel - and being Danish I did not know Willa Cather to start with. But now I do - and I find it in the upper class and compare it to Sigrid Undset: *Kristin Lavransdatter*, which I used to consider the best book ever read by little me. I cannot be described, it just has to be read - and I continued reading all the other books of the same author - finding *Song of the Lark* as beautiful. Her books simply take us down to earth or mildly speaking to the ground under the snow and frost on the prairies over a hundred years ago, when so many settlers tried to conquer the land, that they were awarded. Antonia was a tough girl, who managed to live on under these severe conditions and raise a new family - and it was all told by a third person, who ends up re-visiting the places and people, he grew up with. What a magnificent story.

Chosen for our book club's monthly read by our own native Nebraskan, this colorful old story was a nice escape into my grandparents' past. So descriptive, one can feel the warm summer breeze or biting winter chill, smell the freshly ploughed fields, and taste the juice of summer-ripe melons and sweetness of off the stalk corn like there exists in no other place in the world but the Midwest! I am proud and thankful for my Scandinavian heritage and the backbreaking efforts of the generations before us. The early stories of our lives remain a part of who we are.

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My Antonia Antonia and Her Daughters

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