My Antonia Study Guide

My Antonia by Willa Cather

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Willa Cather's *My Antonia* (1918) is the story of both Antonia Shimerda, a Bohemian immigrant to the state of Nebraska in the 1880s, and the novel's American-born narrator, Jim Burden. The story is told as Jim relates his own image of Antonia in a nostalgic re-creation of his childhood and youth. Their wildly differing places in the social hierarchy account for their respective fortunes. Antonia survives her father's suicide, hires herself out as household help, is abandoned at the altar, gives birth out of wedlock, but achieves fulfillment in her marriage to a Czech farmer, her loving children, and their flourishing farm. Jim, a successful well traveled and cultured East-coast lawyer, remains romantic, nostalgic, and unfulfilled in life. This portrait of Antonia is widely acknowledged as one of the most memorable characters in twentieth-century literature. Through her, Cather celebrates the vitality and fruitfulness of the pioneering era as a type of lost paradise. *My Antonia* is widely considered the best of the author's "Nebraska" novels which reflect her childhood experiences growing up on the plains. Since its appearance, Cather's carefully crafted fiction has gathered a steady following. Her reputation has continued to grow since her death in 1947. Although contemporary reviewers sometimes faulted the author's work as overly nostalgic and obsessed with the past, today critics see Cather's Nebraska novels, and *My Antonia* in particular, as well-crafted, sympathetic portrayals of the uniquely American experience of immigrant pioneers.

Author Biography

Born in Virginia in 1873. Willa Cather spent the first decade of her life on her family's farm in Back Creek Valley. In 1884, her family moved to join her father's relatives among the ethnically diverse settlers of the Great Plains. This area would serve as the inspiration for several of her novels, including *My Antonia* (1918). Her father tried farming but soon settled the family in Red Cloud. Nebraska. a town of approximately 2.500 people. Cather remembered vividly both the trauma of leaving a hill farm for a flat, empty land and the subsequent excitement of growing up in the new country. She took intense pleasure in riding her pony to neighboring farms and listening to the stories of the immigrant farm women she met there. Cather accompanied a local doctor on house calls and by her thirteenth birthday had adopted the outward appearance and manner of a male. She signed her name "William Cather. Jr." or "William Cather. M.D." Eventually returning to more conventional modes of dress, she later dismissed the episode as juvenile posturing.

At sixteen, she left home to prepare to enroll at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, which she entered in 1891. Her freshman English instructor gave her essay on Thomas Carlyle to a Lincoln newspaper for publication and by her junior year, she was supporting herself as a journalist. From Lincoln, she moved to Pittsburgh as a magazine editor and newspaper writer. She then became a high school teacher, using summer vacations to concentrate on fiction. In 1905, she published her first collection of short stories, *The Troll Garden.*

In 1906, Cather was hired to edit *McClure's,* a leading muckraking magazine. and moved to New York City. Her older literary friend Sarah Orne Jewett advised her to "find your own quiet centre of life. and write from that to the world." Nevertheless she found it difficult to give up a position as a highly successful woman editor during a time when journalism was almost wholly dominated by men. and did not quit her position for three years. In 1912, on a visit to her family in Red Cloud. she stood on the edge of a wheat field and watched her first harvest in years. By then. she was emotionally ready to use her youthful memories of Nebraska. From this experience evolved O *Pioneers!,* the novel she preferred to think of as her first. It is this long perspective that gives Cather's work about Nebraska a rich aura of nostalgia, a poignancy also found in her next Nebraska novel, 1918's *My Antonia.*

Although Cather's 1922 novel about World War I, *One of Ours,* was received with mixed critical reviews, it was a best-seller and won Cather the Pulitzer Prize. She continued to write until physical infirmities prevented her from doing so. In 1945, she wrote that she had gotten much of what she wanted from life and had avoided the things she most violently had not wanted-too much money, noisy publicity, and the bother of meeting too many people. Willa Cather died from a massive cerebral hemorrhage on April 24, 1947.

Plot Summary

Introduction

Willa Cather's *My Antonia* begins in the voice of an unnamed narrator who "introduces" not only the novel but also Jim Burden, whose first-person narration begins with chapter one. When these two "Old friends" meet on a train crossing the plains of Iowa, they reminisce together about growing up in a small town on the Nebraska prairie, "buried in wheat and com, under stimulating extremes of climate." Both have long since moved away from the prairie to New York, but their recollections of childhood remain sharp, especially their memories of one "central figure," the "Bohemian girl" named Antonia. "To speak her name," the narrator writes, "was to call up pictures of people and places, to set a quiet drama going in one's brain." The narrator challenges Jim to write down all that he can remember of Antonia, and the manuscript that he creates he calls, "My Antonia."

Book I: The Shimerdas

Jim Burden's story begins with a journey, after the death of his parents, to the home of his grandparents in Black Hawk, Nebraska. Jim learns from the train conductor that a family in the "Immigrant car" are traveling to the same town. In the station he hears, for the first time, the sounds of "a foreign tongue." At the station Jim and his traveling companion, Jake Marpole, are picked up by his grandfather's hired man, Otto Fuchs. Riding in the back of a wagon through the broad prairie land, a land that seems to be "outside man's jurisdiction," Jim feels "erased, blotted out," separated from even the spirits of his deceased parents.

Jim is soon comfortably settled in his grandparents' home and he begins to explore the strange environment of waving red grass that surrounds him there. After the family meets their "new Bohemian neighbors,'" the Shimerdas, Jim quickly becomes Antonia Shimerda's friend and language tutor. But he is less comfortable with the other Shimerdas, especially Antonia's angry and arrogant brother, Ambrosch, and her jealous, deceitful mother. In spite of frequent tensions between the Burdens and the Shimerdas, Jim and Antonia become close companions while exploring the countryside together. Antonia's respect for the younger Jim grows after he kills an enormous rattlesnake; Jim's understanding of what Antonia left behind in Bohemia deepens when they revive a dying cricket that reminds her of her Bohemian childhood.

Memories of life in the "old country" also afflict the Russians, Pavel and Peter, as well as Mr. Shimerda. Pavel and Peter are haunted by the actions of their past: Pavel dies soon after he unburdens his mind to Mr. Shimerda about throwing a bride and groom from their wedding sleigh to a pack of wolves. For Mr. Shimerda, leaving his former life in Bohemia takes the spirit out of him; when Jim first sees him, he thinks his face looks "like ashes-like something from which all the warmth and light had died out."_ Although

Mr. Shimerda pleads with Jim to teach Antonia English, so that she might adjust to life in a new place, he never finds happiness or contentment in America and finally kills himself. After his death, Jim imagines Mr. Shimerda's spirit traveling across the prairie once more, all the way to Baltimore, then over "the great wintry ocean" and back to his homeland.

After the local Norwegian church refuses to allow the burial of Mr. Shimerda in their graveyard, a grave is dug, at the demand of Mrs. Shimerda, directly on the comer of their property. She believes the spot will be a crossroads some day. Her insistence on this Bohemian custom is granted, but Mr. Burden remarks, "If she thinks she will live to see the people of this country ride over that old man's head, she is mistaken." The strongly Protestant Mr. Burden disapproves of the Catholic rituals of the Shimerdas and of a new Bohemian homesteader, Anton Jelinek. Nevertheless, he respects the strength of their faith, and he offers a moving prayer at Mr. Shimerda's graveside. Jim begins attending the country school and asks Antonia to do so with him, but she refuses because of her increased responsibilities on the farm. Although she admired her father's learning, she also takes pride in her strength and ability on the farm and in helping to "make this land one good farm." Finally, when Jim asks her why she is working so hard and emulating her brother Ambrosch, Antonia responds, "Things will be easy for you. But they will be hard for us."

Book II: The Hired Girls

Three years after Jim's arrival, his grandfather moves the family from the farm into Black Hawk, and they quickly come to feel "like town people." Jim's grandmother convinces the family next door, the Harlings, to hire Antonia as a live-in cook. In town, Antonia renews her friendship with Jim and begins to socialize with the other "hired girls," especially Lena Lingard and Tiny Soderball To Jim and to the girls, town life offers more interesting diversions than farm life. This includes a visit by a negro piano player, Blind d' Amault, and the dance pavilion set up by traveling dance instructors. Antonia's enthusiasm for dancing leads Mr. Harling to accuse her of earning "a reputation for being free and easy.'" He demands that she stop attending dances or find new employment. Antonia refuses to yield to his demand and leaves the Harlings to work for Wick Cutter, a disreputable money-lender who was "notoriously dissolute with women.'" When Jim's grandmother suspects that Cutter will assault Antonia, Jim takes her place for one night and is savagely attacked by Cutter. Jim grows increasingly restless in Black Hawk, becoming contemptuous of the narrow, small-minded ways of the townsfolk. After graduating from high school and exhausting the limited possibilities for diversion in the town, Jim resolves to study through the summer so that he can leave for college as soon as possible.

Book III: Lena Lingard

At the university, Jim is introduced to "the world of Ideas" by his professor and advisor, Gaston Cleric. Lena Lingard, who has set up a dressmaking shop in Lincoln, visits Jim

one night and the two quickly renew their friendship. Jim's attraction to Lena grows as they attend the theater and spend more time together. But at the urging of Gaston Cleric he resolves to leave Lincoln for Harvard to continue his education. Before he informs Lena of his decision, she tells him that she never wishes to marry, stating that she has experienced enough of the trials of "family life" to last her a lifetime.

Book IV: The Pioneer Woman's Story

Returning to Black Hawk for a summer before entering law school, Jim seeks out information about Antonia, who has returned to her family after being deserted, with child, by her fiancé, Larry Donovan. Jim reflects on the unexpected success of the other "hired girls," Lena and Tiny Soderball, and he feels "bitterly disappointed" in Antonia for "becoming an object of pity." Jim visits the Widow Steavens, who lives on the Burden's old farm, and she recounts Antonia's sad story Finally, Jim visits Antonia herself, who is working in the fields once again. They express their deep feelings of attachment to each other, and Jim leaves with a promise to return.

Book V: Cuzak's Boys

Jim fulfills his promise after twenty years, finally returning to visit Antonia in spite of his fears of finding her "aged and broken." He finds her aged but not broken, instead glowing with the "fire of life," delighted With her husband and happy children, and proud of their productive farm Jim takes pleasure in watching Antonia interact with her children, "conscious of a kind of physical harmony" around her, and he recognizes the powerful place that Antonia holds in his own mind.

Antonia had always been one to leave images in the mind that did not fade-that grew stronger with time.

In my memory there was a succession of such pictures, fixed there like the old woodcuts of one's first primer Antonia kicking her bare legs against the sides of my pony when we came home in triumph with our snake; Antonia in her black shawl and fur cap, as she stood by her father's grave in the snowstorm; Antonia coming in with her work-team along the evening sky-line She lent herself to immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct as universal and true [S]he still had that something which fires the imagination, could still stop one's breath for a moment by a look or gesture that somehow revealed the meaning in common things She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last...

It was no wonder that her sons stood tall and straight She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races.

After leaving Antonia and her family with a promise that he will return, Jim stands on the "old road" outside of Black Hawk that he and Antonia had traveled as children, now confident that this "road of Destiny ... was to bring us together again."

Introduction

Introduction Summary

An unknown narrator introduces the reader to Jim Burden. Both Jim Burden and the narrator grew up in the same Nebraska town, and they have met on a train crossing Iowa. Jim and the narrator currently live in New York, and we learn that Jim acts as legal counsel for one of the railways. The narrator mentions a dislike for Jim's wife, for she is unimpressionable. However, the narrator notes that Jim has changed little since their childhood. The discussion turns to their memories of A'ntonia, a Bohemian girl they both knew, and Jim says that he has been writing down his memories of her. Months after this meeting on the train, Jim Burden delivers a manuscript to the narrator at his apartment asking if the narrator would still like to read it. Jim titles his manuscript "My A'ntonia" on the spot.

Introduction Analysis

In the introduction, the reader learns several basic pieces of information. First, we learn that Jim Burden grew up in Nebraska, but he has since relocated to New York and has become a lawyer. The reader also learns that A'ntonia has left an impression upon both Jim Burden and the unknown narrator during their childhoods- enough of an impression for Jim Burden to begin writing these memories down. Finally, we learn that this manuscript, "My A'ntonia," has been written without any forethought and planning. Instead, the story is written as Jim's memory recalls A'ntonia.

Book 1: Chapter 1

Book 1: Chapter 1 Summary

Jim Burden is now a ten-year-old boy riding on a train from Virginia to Nebraska. Jim has lost both his mother and father in the last year, and he is being sent to live with his grandparents. Jim is in the company of one of his father's workers, Jake Marpole. A conductor tells Jim and Jake about a Bohemian family on board the train. When the train stops in Black Hawk, Nebraska, Jim gets his first look at the Shimerda family. There is a woman, an old man, two half-grown boys and two girls in this family. Jim and Jake are picked up by Otto Fuchs who works for Jim's grandparents. Jim describes the area as being nothing but land, and this impression comes from what he can see at night.

Book 1: Chapter 1 Analysis

Jim Burden's trip to Nebraska from Virginia parallels the story of the Shimerda family's trip from the Old World to Nebraska. The Shimerda family is described only briefly; with Jim's interest being caught by his first sound of a foreign language. Jim's description of the landscape as barren and seemingly even uncivilized is his first response to the area. This is an important aspect of understanding his character, which has moved from the lush and populated Virginia. This is also an introduction into the recurring motif of the landscape reflecting and symbolizing the lives of the main characters. It is worthwhile to note that Willa Cather herself made this same move from Virginia and had a similar response to Nebraska.

Book 1: Chapter 2

Book 1: Chapter 2 Summary

Jim arrives at his grandfather's farm during the night and does not awaken until the next afternoon. Jim's grandmother meets him with tears and immediately gets Jim bathed. Jim learns that the Shimerdas are the nearest neighbors. Jim meets his grandfather, learns of Otto's Austrian background and gets a pony named Dude. The next morning, Jim goes to look about and notices the amount of moving red grass, which surrounds everything. While in the garden with his grandmother, Jim is warned about rattlesnakes and is shown a rattlesnake cane. Jim feels happy and content in his new surroundings.

Book 1: Chapter 2 Analysis

In this chapter, we learn that Jim's grandmother is 55 years old, likes order and is strong and enduring. We also learn that Jim's grandfather is dignified, with bright blue eyes, and has a quiet kindness about him. Otto is a worker of Austrian heritage, who has had various exciting jobs as a stage-driver and cowboy. Otto has a long scar across one cheek, and he is missing the top of his left ear. What Jim learns about the rattlesnake cane is foreshadowing a future encounter Jim will have with one. Jim's final description of the landscape, "that is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great," was eventually put on Willa Cather's gravestone. Jim's pleasure and excitement about this new and different place is the beginning of a series of impacting life events and impressions for Jim that the reader will learn about in Book 1.

Book 1: Chapter 3

Book 1: Chapter 3 Summary

Jim's family delivers items to help the new Bohemian family. The reader learns that the Shimerdas bought the homestead from a man named Krajiek, who is a fellow Bohemian, and overpaid for a place that is more a hole than a home. The Shimerda family members are described more closely. The family consists of the mother, a shrewd, suspicious looking Ambrosch, a pretty A'ntonia, a little girl named Yulka and a boy named Marek who has webbed fingers and behaves strangely. Mr. Shimerda is described as being very gentlemanly and dignified. A'ntonia, Jim, and Yulka run off to play. A'ntonia is eager to learn English, and tries to give Jim her ring. Mr. Shimerda gives Jim's grandmother a book with English and Bohemian translations and asks her to teach A'ntonia English.

Book 1: Chapter 3 Analysis

The reader learns about the Shimerdas' situation with Krajiek and the homestead, and we know this is the beginning of long-term trouble for the family. Mr. Shimerda seems very out of place in this rough countryside. The trouble with Krajiek, the barely inhabitable home and Mr. Shimerda's displacement will play itself out by the end of Book 1. When A'ntonia wants to give Jim her ring, it is an example of the family's unusual generosity.

Book 1: Chapter 4

Book 1: Chapter 4 Summary

Jim talks of riding his pony on errands all over the countryside for his grandparents. Jim retells an anecdote about the Mormon's fleeing persecution and scattering sunflower seeds everywhere. This anecdote supposedly explains why sunflowers grow in Nebraska. A'ntonia has reading lessons with Jim's grandmother almost every day and learns about housekeeping and cooking as well. The reader learns about how the Shimerdas hate Krajiek, but they remain tied to him due to their shared heritage and the business of the home.

Book 1: Chapter 4 Analysis

A'ntonia is clearly the family member who is working the hardest to adopt this new culture and learn the ways of Nebraska. Krajiek is described as a rattlesnake, and the Shimerdas are compared with the prairie dogs that have to live with him. The Shimerdas are unable to protect themselves from Krajiek, and yet, they are dependent upon him in some ways. This extended metaphor will be played out by the end of Book 1.

Book 1: Chapter 5

Book 1: Chapter 5 Summary

Life is difficult for the Shimerdas, but they never complain. A'ntonia tells Jim about the Russians, Pavel and Peter, whom her father has met and befriended. Pavel is said to be an anarchist and is bulky and knotty looking. Peter is short and fat, seems to be friendly, and goes to the local church. Jim and A'ntonia decide to go and meet with them. They catch Peter while he is doing laundry. Peter explains he is proud of his cow because in Russia only wealthy people are able to have them. Peter offers the children melons, plays the harmonica for them and sends A'ntonia home with milk and cucumbers.

Book 1: Chapter 5 Analysis

This chapter gives Jim another look into the lives of immigrants to understand the type of people they are – friendly, welcoming, and culturally different. Throughout this novel, readers will hear many stories about different people's lives and backgrounds.

Book 1: Chapter 6

Book 1: Chapter 6 Summary

A'ntonia, now mentioned as Tony sometimes, comes again for a reading lesson with Jim's grandmother. A'ntonia tells of how esteemed the badger is in her country as well as a story of a beggar woman named Old Hata who sang for children and was very beloved. It is late afternoon and Jim describes this time of day as a time of triumph and success. A'ntonia and Jim see Mr. Shimerda walking with a gun, and A'ntonia mentions how sad he has been. The children go over to him and pull him out of his reverie. In this moment, Jim admires Mr. Shimerda's gun, and Mr. Shimerda says he will give it to Jim when he is older.

Book 1: Chapter 6 Analysis

A'ntonia's reading lesson and the lofty description of the landscape and the setting sun is in sharp contrast with the sorrowful image of Mr. Shimerda. At this point, the reader cannot ignore that there is a deep dissatisfaction and melancholy in Mr. Shimerda. Apparently, only A'ntonia can pull him out of his sad states. A'ntonia is both a beacon of the future and a representative of what is unwavering for her father.

Book 1: Chapter 7

Book 1: Chapter 7 Summary

Jim notes that A'ntonia acts superior to him and knows it may have to do with her being four years older than he is. A'ntonia and Jim ride to Russian Peter's to borrow a spade for her brother Ambrosch. On their return, the children decide to investigate the prairie dog holes by digging into them. A'ntonia and Jim see a five foot long rattlesnake, which is described as being an ancient evil. Jim kills it with the spade and suddenly becomes a big hero to A'ntonia. They drag the dead snake back to show everyone Jim's accomplishment. Upon reflection, Jim knows luck allowed him to kill the rattlesnake .

Book 1: Chapter 7 Analysis

This is the third time in the novel that rattlesnakes appear. In this scene, the rattlesnake is again described as wicked and evil. Although the rattlesnake is conquered in this scene, the symbolic rattlesnake, Krajiek, continues living with the Shimerdas.

Book 1: Chapter 8

Book 1: Chapter 8 Summary

The Russians, Peter and Pavel, are having money troubles and are indebted to an evil man named Wick Cutter. Pavel is injured on a job and is victim of the bad luck that is said to plague the Russians. Pavel is doing very poorly, and Peter comes to fetch A'ntonia and her father. Jim goes along. Coyotes are wailing in the background, and Peter is coughing up blood. Pavel tells a story to Mr. Shimerda which A'ntonia later retells to Jim.

The story is of Peter and Pavel in Russia as members of a wedding party that is returning at night to their home village after the festivities are over. The sledges are under attack by wolves, and at one point, the sleigh Peter and Pavel are on is the only remaining one. Pavel wants to throw the bride off the sleigh to lighten the load, but the groom will not allow him. Both the bride and groom are knocked off the sleigh and eaten by wolves. Peter and Pavel return to their village as the only surviving people of the wedding party and are run out of their village. Their story follows them all over Russia, and finally they end up in America. After Pavel tells his story to Mr. Shimerda, he dies within days. Peter leaves his home to become a cook for the railroad construction crews.

Book 1: Chapter 8 Analysis

This is the first mention of the evil Wick Cutter who plays a big role in the plot later in the novel. The story about Peter, Pavel and the wedding party is a horrible one. The story is used as an explanation for the Russians' bad luck. Many of the anecdotes of this book become the second storyline and add richness and depth to the simple plot. Many of the anecdotes are also often very sad, heart wrenching, and teach the reader the backgrounds of many immigrants.

Book 1: Chapter 9

Book 1: Chapter 9 Summary

The first snow falls in December, and Jim's eyes fall on a circle in the landscape that was mysteriously made by Indians. Jim has a sled built by Fuchs and takes A'ntonia and Yulka on a ride. Everyone is cold, and later Jim gets sick and must stay inside. Jim's description of staying indoors is of warmth, comfort and hearing stories of Fuchs's adventurous life. Fuchs shares a humorous story about his trip to America in which he is supposed to escort a woman on her way to meet her husband. The woman has triplets, and everyone is skeptical of Fuchs and what has happened between him and this woman, although nothing ever occurred.

Book 1: Chapter 9 Analysis

The plot resumes with pleasant memories of Jim's first wintry experience with his new family. Life is busy on the farm, but it is cozy inside.

Book 1: Chapter 10

Book 1: Chapter 10 Summary

The Shimerdas stay in their home to survive the cold and only have one coat to share among them. Jim and his family bring goods again. Mrs. Shimerda is hostile when they first arrive, but she is thankful for what the Burdens bring. Mr. Shimerda explains that they are not beggars and that the family had money and are trying to get by until spring. Marek is again in the scene, but controls himself better. Mrs. Shimerda gives them dried mushrooms from Bohemia, but Jim's family does not know what they are at the time. Later discussion describes Ambrosch, the oldest son, as mean and hard working.

Book 1: Chapter 10 Analysis

The Shimerdas' desperate condition is sharply contrasted with the coziness of what Jim is describing in chapter nine. Mr. Shimerda again reveals himself a dignified man who wants to be honorable and not just accept charity. The reader realizes again that life is difficult for the Bohemian family.

Book 1: Chapter 11

Book 1: Chapter 11 Summary

During the week of Christmas, Jake is supposed to do the Christmas shopping for the family. However, the farm is snowed in. The family makes gifts instead of relying on the stores. They make books for A'ntonia and Yulka, and they make candles and gingerbread men for the Shimerdas. When the grandfather goes to deliver the gifts, he chops down a Christmas tree to bring home for Jim. The family decorates the tree, and Otto Fuchs's ornaments sent to him from his mother in Austria get special attention.

Book 1: Chapter 11 Analysis

The Christmas tree is special for Jim because it is a connection to his father, and his grandfather remembers how much Jim likes Christmas trees. The description of Otto's ornaments is followed by a comment about Jake and Otto being workers who may never have families of their own. It is evident that even without their own families Jake and Otto have been included in the Burden family.

Book 1: Chapter 12

Book 1: Chapter 12 Summary

It is Christmas morning and grandfather reads the morning prayers. Jim particularly likes hearing his grandfather's voice reading prayers. The day is still full of chores, but Otto writes home to his mother on Christmas day, as is his annual ritual. Mr. Shimerda visits and is described as being particularly at ease and comfortable. At one point Mr. Shimerda kneels and prays before the Christmas tree, which seems like idolization to the Burdens. Mr. Shimerda also stays for dinner.

Book 1: Chapter 12 Analysis

Mr. Shimerda's contentment during his visit is the focal point of this chapter. Mr. Shimerda feels happy, at peace in this cozy home, and it moves him to pray. Again, the reader is faced with recognizing the hardships with which the Shimerdas live.

Book 1: Chapter 13

Book 1: Chapter 13 Summary

There is a thaw after Christmas. A'ntonia and her mother visit the Burdens. Mrs. Shimerda is boastful and greedy and takes a pot from them. A'ntonia says that her father is not well. Jim learns that Mrs. Shimerda wanted to come to America but Mr. Shimerda did not. Ambrosch is considered the important one in the family. Jim says that he hopes Mrs. Shimerda does not visit them again. The bulls think it is spring and are beginning to fight until they are broken up. A blizzard hits on Jim's eleventh birthday, January 20. The Burden family, snowed in, is trying to take care of the animals.

Book 1: Chapter 13 Analysis

Mrs. Shimerda's visit is an unpleasant one, and Jim's grandmother remarks that you never know how people will respond when their family is in need. Again, the story is building up to a breaking point that the family will face because of their difficulties.

Book 1: Chapter 14

Book 1: Chapter 14 Summary

Jim wakes up on January 22 and knows that something exciting is happening. Jim finds out that Mr. Shimerda is dead, and Ambrosch is sleeping in their kitchen. Jim's grandfather believes Mr. Shimerda shot himself while lying down in the barn and using his toes. Jake found Krajiek's axe under the manger in the barn, and he thinks it matches the gash in Mr. Shimerda's face. Krajiek behaves very nervously and is scared. Ambrosch has been praying all morning, and Jim's grandmother wants to visit the family. Fuchs rides to fetch the priest and coroner, and everyone else but Jim heads to the Shimerdas' home.

In the meantime, Jim collects firewood, takes care of the hens and begins enjoying the quiet of being alone. Jim believes homesickness killed Mr. Shimerda and that his spirit is hovering over their home because he had been so content there. Jim recalls all of Mr. Shimerda's memories and stories. Everyone returns home, and Jake tells Jim about the Shimerdas's belief that Mr. Shimerda's soul is in Purgatory and his family is praying for him.

Book 1: Chapter 14 Analysis

After much mention about Mr. Shimerda's depression for several chapters, it is not very surprising that he takes his own life. He appears to have organized each detail and even commits this act while looking neat and trim as is typical for his character. However, the skepticism about Krajiek is not easy to ignore after all of the recurring elements about his evilness, bad ways, and symbolic descriptions of being a rattlesnake. It is notable to see how the neighbors pull together at this point, and it will continue even more during the next chapter.

Book 1: Chapter 15

Book 1: Chapter 15 Summary

Fuchs returns home bringing a young Bohemian, Anton Jelinek, with him. Jelinek is described as being young, handsome, and warmhearted. Jelinek feels guilty about not visiting the Shimerdas sooner, but he was busy with work. Jelinek states that the Shimerdas will worry about there being no priest yet, for Mr. Shimerda's final act is a major sin. Jelinek relates the story of when he was a boy who accompanied a priest during a time of war when men were dying from illnesses. Jelinek believes that because they were carrying the sacrament, he and the priest did not catch the illness. Jelinek is to break a road to the Shimerda home through the snow, and Fuchs is to make the coffin.

While Otto is building the coffin, he tells a story about two Swedes having a fall at a mining camp and surviving, but then when an Italian man did the same thing he died. The postmaster and another neighbor stop by the Burden home on their way to visit the Shimerdas. Everyone is discussing why no cemetery will take Mr. Shimerda's body and the issue of where he will be buried. Fuchs continues entertaining Jim by telling him stories, and the coroner arrives. The coroner says if it were not for Jim's grandfather he would have gotten a warrant for Krajiek's arrest because of the axe and his nervousness. Mrs. Shimerda wants her husband buried at the corner of her lot where there is to be a crossroads some day. No one really understands why she wants this, but Jelinek thinks it may be a custom from where she comes.

Book 1: Chapter 15 Analysis

In this chapter, we see the involvement of the community during a time of need. How to handle Mr. Shimerda's body, along with the ramifications of his suicide, reveals again the cultural differences among the immigrants. This chapter also contains a few more anecdotes about the old country.

Book 1: Chapter 16

Book 1: Chapter 16 Summary

Mr. Shimerda is buried on the fifth day after his death at the place of Mrs. Shimerda's wishes. Jim's family and other neighbors come to visit. The Shimerdas make the sign of a cross over their father, but Yulka is afraid. Mrs. Shimerda asks Jim's grandfather for a prayer in English for everyone to understand, and Fuchs sings a hymn. On reflection, Jim notes that the road never did cross over Mr. Shimerda's grave just as Jim's grandfather had predicted.

Book 1: Chapter 16 Analysis

Again, the reader sees the community coming together and the religious and cultural differences among all these people. We are also introduced to the symbolic use of the seasons to reflect the events of the plot. Winter is the season of Mr. Shimerda's death and in the future winter will be described as difficult and bleak.

Book 1: Chapter 17

Book 1: Chapter 17 Summary

Spring arrives and the Shimerdas have a home the neighbors helped them build in March. Jim now gives reading lessons to Yulka. A'ntonia is fifteen years old and is no longer a child to Jim. Jim visits A'ntonia on behalf of his grandmother to ask if she will attend school. A'ntonia cannot go because she has to help with the farming, but she wants Jim to tell her what he learns and mentions how educated her father was. Jim stays for dinner, but the discussion becomes mean when Mrs. Shimerda complains about a cow Jim's grandfather sold her and an old broken axe for which Ambrosch says he was not responsible. Jim is critical of A'ntonia's rough manners from working the farm, and he is aware that people are talking badly of her.

Book 1: Chapter 17 Analysis

Spring is symbolic of change in this novel. In this chapter, we see the changes in the Shimerda family after the death of Mr. Shimerda. A'ntonia has become a farm girl and must sacrifice her education for the family.

Book 1: Chapter 18

Book 1: Chapter 18 Summary

Jake and Jim have the beginnings of a feud with the Shimerdas when they go to retrieve a horse collar that had been lent to Ambrosch. Ambrosch denies he has one and gives them one that has been mistreated. Ambrosch and Jake get in a scuffle, and Jake and Jim leave amidst yelling from Mrs. Shimerda and A'ntonia. Jake takes Jim's grandfather's advice, goes to town to pay the fine for hitting Ambrosch and sells a pig simultaneously. The Shimerdas get satisfaction from thinking Jake had to sell the pig to afford the fine. Jim's grandfather does not get involved in the fighting.

Later, when Marek and Ambrosch are off working at another farm, one of their horses gets colic and A'ntonia gets help from Jim's grandfather. Meanwhile, with his wages, Ambrosch pays a priest to pray for Mr. Shimerda's soul while A'ntonia needs new shoes. Grandfather sets up reconciliation between the families by inviting Ambrosch and A'ntonia to help them with the harvest as hired workers. Jim's grandfather also tells Mrs. Shimerda that she does not need to pay him any more money for the cow he sold her.

Book 1: Chapter 18 Analysis

This chapter reveals a change in the relationship between Jim and the Shimerdas that is quickly resolved. This chapter also shows the need for neighbors to support one another during these times out in the country.

Book 1: Chapter 19

Book 1: Chapter 19 Summary

It is now July, and Jim describes the effect of the heat on making the corn wonderful in this part of the country. A'ntonia is working in the house with Jim's grandmother. Jim and A'ntonia watch a lightning storm together. A'ntonia is content and says she does not want winter to come and wishes her father were still alive. Jim asks her why she is not always nice and like her self any more. A'ntonia replies that life will be hard for her family during the upcoming winter while Jim has it easy.

Book 1: Chapter 19 Analysis

When A'ntonia lets her guard down during this scene with Jim, the reader again gets the recurring idea that life is still very difficult for the immigrants who are not completely settled. While the story is told from Jim's point of view, he cannot relate or empathize with the Shimerdas entirely because his move has brought him into the established and settled home of his grandparents.

Book 2: Chapter 1

Book 2: Chapter 1 Summary

Jim has now been living with his grandparents for three years. The family decides to move into the town of Black Hawk to leave the hard work of the farm behind. Jim is thirteen at this time and is supposed to attend school. The move happens during March, and Jake and Otto work for the family until the very end before they decide to go back to rejoin the Wild West, despite discouragement from the Burdens. By the end of April, the Burdens feel like town people. Jim's grandparents are actively involved in the church, and Jim is picking up schoolboy behaviors like teasing girls and using bad language. Mrs. Harling, the Burden's neighbor, keeps an eye on Jim and does not let him play with her children if he is out of line.

Country neighbors stop by all of the time to socialize and rest when they come to town. However, when Ambrosch visits he says very little about his family. Mrs. Steavens, who bought the Burdens' farm, grows fond of A'ntonia and tells the Burdens what a hard worker she is, how Ambrosch hires her out as a man, and that many people in the country like her. At the end of the chapter, we learn that Jim's grandmother has played a hand in having A'ntonia hired to work for the Harlings.

Book 2: Chapter 1 Analysis

The move to town is an important one in Jim's life, and yet the narration does not document much information. The reader learns that his family tolerates the move well and enjoys their new companionship with country people who stop by to visit. However, other than this information, the chapter is merely an introduction into a new phase of Jim's life, which is not nearly so drastic as his move from Virginia to Nebraska. Again, the reader sees the motif of spring being a time for change during this chapter with the Burdens' move to town.

Book 2: Chapter 2

Book 2: Chapter 2 Summary

Jim's grandmother enjoys living next to the Harlings who are of Norwegian descent. Mr. Harling is a very successful grain merchant and cattle buyer who is away from home often. Mrs. Harling is the head of the household while her husband is away and is described as being short, sturdy and energetic with a pleasing laugh. There are five Harling children. Charley, the only boy, is sixteen. Julia is the same age as Jim. Sally is thirteen and is described as clever and wild. Frances is a young woman who works as a bookkeeper for her father's business. She is responsible, hardworking, and involved in the community. Frances is even noted to have helped Jim's grandfather save people from the before mentioned bad Wick Cutter. The fifth child, Nina, is not mentioned until the next chapter.

In August, the Harling's cook leaves them, and Jim's grandmother recommends A'ntonia. The Harlings go out to visit A'ntonia's family and upon their return laugh about the meeting in the retelling for Jim and his grandmother. Ambrosch is worried that A'ntonia will be made a fool of and he wants all of the money she makes. In the end, everyone decides on three dollars per week and for the Harlings to keep A'ntonia in shoes. Mrs. Shimerda insists on paying three geese for the shoes. The Harlings mention how attractive A'ntonia is, and Jim's grandmother tells them the Shimerdas' history and about the death of Mr. Shimerda.

Book 2: Chapter 2 Analysis

The reader is introduced to some very likeable new characters in this chapter. A'ntonia is reintroduced into the main storyline, and we learn that Ambrosch and Mrs. Shimerda have not changed much.

Book 2: Chapter 3

Book 2: Chapter 3 Summary

A'ntonia shows up at the Burden home and Jim recollects how good it is to have her around again. Mrs. Harlings states that A'ntonia's only fault is when she stops working to play with the children. A'ntonia admires Charley Harling and thinks he is very smart. She shows this by making him his favorite treats and doing his mending. A'ntonia also loves Nina who is the six year old daughter with lovely eyes and a sensitive nature.

When Mr. Harling is away, evenings are jolly, but when he is home, he wants all of his wife's attention and sends the children to bed early. Mr. Harling is described by Jim as an aristocrat with his own easy chair, an arrogant and commanding figure and having a wife who caters to his every need. Unless Mr. Harling is home, the house is never quiet, for every person is rambunctious and someone is often playing the piano.

Book 2: Chapter 3 Analysis

Jim's relationship with the Harlings is very intimate as if he is a part of their family. Jim's description of Mr. Harling seems to come from a twinge of jealousy in that Mr. Harling comes between Jim and his relationship with the jolly Harlings.

Book 2: Chapter 4

Book 2: Chapter 4 Summary

The chapter begins with the children and Jim teasing A'ntonia about making a cake for Charley. A knock is at the door, and when A'ntonia answers it, Lena Linguard is there. We learn that she has come to town to work as a dressmaker. Lena stays to visit a while, and A'ntonia is uncomfortable with bringing her in to sit with the Harlings. Lena tells of another girl, Tiny Soderball, who will be coming to town to work at the hotel in town. Mrs. Harling does not approve of such work for a girl and Frances invites Lena back should she get lonesome or need advice.

The reader learns that A'ntonia is uncomfortable with Lena's visit because of the gossip that used to be told about her in the country. Lena used to herd her father's cattle in the open country. Lena's father was not very successful, and she was always knitting and running about in raggedy clothing. Lena was accused of making Ole Benson lose his mind because he used to follow her and spend too much time with her while she was herding cattle. Ole Benson's wife, Crazy Mary, had been sent to an asylum, and she used to chase Lena and threaten to kill her. Many women did not like Lena's association with Ole.

Book 2: Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter is an important introduction to Lena Linguard who will be romantically involved with Jim in the next book of this novel. We learn that she seems wild, has an easy laugh and has a friendly time with men. We also learn that she is done with farming and doing outdoor work. Lena speaks of her talent in dressmaking and plans to help get her mother away from the farm when she can. All of the character traits we learn about Lena will remain true throughout this book.

Book 2: Chapter 5

Book 2: Chapter 5 Summary

Jim often meets Lena downtown and while walking, her home hears about her dressmaking and visits with Tiny Soderball at the Boy's Home Hotel. We learn that this hotel is the best in its territory and all business travelers try to get there. On Saturday nights, there is music and singing, and after the work is done, Tiny and Lena sit outside the door to listen to the music. Lena believes traveling men have a fun life and thinks Jim should become one. These men are generous and give Tiny small gifts, and some of these she shares with Lena. One day, Jim runs into Lena and her little brother who is buying Christmas presents. After Lena's little brother leaves, she comments about being homesick sometimes.

Book 2: Chapter 5 Analysis

This chapter acts as a brief vignette that reveals the common changes these hired girls go through when leaving their country lives and families behind to move to the exciting town. Although the girls seem happy to leave farm work behind, there is still sadness about leaving their families. These girls are also expected to help the family financially.

Book 2: Chapter 6

Book 2: Chapter 6 Summary

Winter has returned in a rather harsh manner, and Jim describes the town as ugly, bleak and desolate. Jim describes dark walks home from school and his attraction to the colored light outside of the Methodist Church where people would gather. Jim is also drawn to the Harlings' warm home, and if he could not go because of Mr. Harling's presence, he is very disappointed. During the evening at the Harlings, everyone sits comfortably in the parlor, and A'ntonia would bake a treat at anyone's request. A'ntonia would tell stories of Bohemia, and one night she told the family a new story about when she was threshing grain.

On a very hot day during summer, a tramp wanders up to the threshers and says to A'ntonia that the water is so low in the country that a person would be unable to drown himself. A'ntonia describes his odd speech and how the tramp offered to thresh for Ole Iverson who is hot and tired. A'ntonia tries to warn Ole that something is not right with this man. The tramp climbs up the threshing machine, jumps in and dies. Nina gets upset by the story and Mrs. Harling tells her to stop. No one could find out anything about the tramp, but a poem was found, "The Old Oaken Bucket," in his pocket. The chapter ends with a description of the easy, harmonic relationship between the strong and independent A'ntonia and Mrs. Harling.

Book 2: Chapter 6 Analysis

This chapter begins with another description of the effect of the environment on people. We are again reminded that winter can be harsh and difficult, and Jim seeks out comfort and companionship. A'ntonia's story is another sad anecdote woven into the larger plot about how difficult times and life are for people struggling to survive.

Book 2: Chapter 7

Book 2: Chapter 7 Summary

Jim describes how winter lingers for too long in country towns without the business of farm work to keep life moving. In January and February, Jim ice skates with the Harlings, but he complains of being tired of school and winter. Jim describes one break from the monotony when Blind d'Arnault, a blind African-American pianist, plays at the hotel. Mrs. Harling sends A'ntonia to hear him play and Jim goes, too. Mrs. Gardener, the mistress of the hotel, has left town and her husband, who is not as managerial as her, is left in charge. Everyone senses the freedom this brings. Mrs. Gardener is described as being well dressed, cold, and as a good manager of the hotel.

While Blind d'Arnault walks in, Jim describes his unattractive, friendly face and the swaying movement of his body. We learn the history of when Blind d'Arnault contracted an illness that left him blind at three weeks old. His mother was ashamed of him and tried to keep him away from others, but she did not believe he was completely wrong in that he began talking early and remembering everything that he was told. He was usually an obedient child, but he began running away to hear Miss Nellie d'Arnault practicing piano in the house. After a time of going just to listen, d'Arnault went into the home and began playing the piano by ear. He was found by Miss Nellie, and they tried to give him lessons, but the music came to him in such a different way that he continued to play by his ear for the sounds and his own sense of rhythm.

In the middle of one of his songs, d'Arnault hears the girls dancing in the other room. The girls protest that Mrs. Gardener would not like it, but soon Tiny, Lena, A'ntonia and Mary Dusak dance with the men and are described as having the light of youth. Everyone dances until d'Arnault is done playing, and Jim walks home with A'ntonia.

Book 2: Chapter 7 Analysis

This chapter is lighthearted in nature in that it is a retelling of a fun and memorable evening for Jim and the immigrant girls. However, we again read a sad story mixed in with pleasantness. The story of Blind d'Arnault tells of a man overcoming great hardships since the time of being a baby. He is described as being abnormal and something of which to be ashamed. Even Jim's description of this man is racist in nature, and given his background, growing up in Virginia is not too surprising. However, d'Arnault's story is set against the backdrop of the story of immigrants who are mistreated and struggling. Yet, the story from Jim's point of view does not provide us the same sensitivity to d'Arnault's story as we often hear about others.

Book 2: Chapter 8

Book 2: Chapter 8 Summary

Spring arrives and Jim and the Harling children are elated. In a foretelling quote Jim says, "Yet the summer which was to change everything was coming nearer everyday." We are reminded that the children of this novel are growing up. A dancing pavilion has been set up by three Italians, the Vannis, who teach dancing. The entire town is drawn to this social tent; mothers bring their daughters, boys sell pop and lemonade there, and the girls have somewhere to wear their new dresses. The Saturday night dances are open to everyone; country boys and girls come in to dance; Jim and A'ntonia dance with their friends, and even the railroad men come to dance.

Book 2: Chapter 8 Analysis

After the dreariness of the winter, the awakening of spring and the boys and girls is a cheerful change. There is no doubt in the reader's mind that the dancing pavilion is the center of social activity in town now. We are given many clues that the plot will be driven by what events happen there and how the social structure will change this summer.

Book 2: Chapter 9

Book 2: Chapter 9 Summary

Jim relates the social situation of how so many young men are attracted to the country girls who come to town to work. These girls are described as hardworking, vigorous, and healthy. In comparison, the town girls are described as being pretty, but remaining indoors and not very physically fit. However, these town girls consider themselves refined while the country girls are not. In the end, the immigrant girls who work hard become a benefit to their family in that they help get their fathers out of debt and usually marry a neighbor of their own nationality. Eventually, these girls run some of the most successful farms. In the meantime, the American farmers do not let their daughters work and do not pay off their debts as quickly. Jim says, "I always knew I should live long enough to see my country girls come into their own, and I have."

The town boys know they will marry town girls, but their attention is caught by the immigrant girls. The immigrant girls were considered a threat, but the town boys know their duty and visit the stuffy parlors of the town girls. The three Marys often became the center of gossip because two have had to leave for periods, which suggests possible pregnancy. The Italian dancing pavilion brings these social differences to a neutral ground where town boys and country girls can dance. Jim tells the story of a Sylvester Lovett who watches Lena and pays much attention to her. Lovett reminds Jim of Ole Benson. Finally, Lovett's escape is to marry a widow six years older than him who owns land. Jim feels contempt for these town boys.

Book 2: Chapter 9 Analysis

This chapter highlights for the reader again the difference between the immigrant, country girls and the people of town. Despite how well liked, hardworking, and jovial the girls are, they are clearly in a different social standing as the other town people. The fun of the pavilion comes from the equal ground the boys and girls find and the fun they have together dancing. Jim's closing description of his dislike of the town boys makes the reader wonder what he would do in similar circumstances. Would Jim break out of the social boundaries to spend time with the girls despite pressure from town people? The question will eventually have to be answered in the course of the book. Jim's affection towards the country girls is as obvious as his dislike of the town boys.

Book 2: Chapter 10

Book 2: Chapter 10 Summary

A'ntonia is noticed at the pavilion when she begins socializing more with Tiny, Lena, and their friends. A'ntonia becomes obsessed with the tent, and soon her popularity there has boys lingering for too long at the Harlings. One night, a man engaged to be married, Harry Paine, tries to kiss A'ntonia who slaps him on the face. Mr. Harling witnesses this event and orders A'ntonia to stop going to the dances or she will have to get another job. Mrs. Harling supports her husband's wishes. A'ntonia does not want to stop attending the dances, and despite Mrs. Harling and Frances trying to reason with her, she responds, "A young girl like me has got to get her good times when she can." A'ntonia is considering going to work for the Cutters despite everything horrible she has heard about them. Frances relates this incident to Jim's grandmother.

Book 2: Chapter 10 Analysis

A'ntonia's fun is costing her the secure work she has with the Harlings and her relationship with the family. By going to work for the Cutters, there is no telling in what trouble she may find her self. Wick Cutter has been negatively referred to several times in this novel. However, A'ntonia's words reveal that she is willing to pay the price for getting her good times while she can. Knowing A'ntonia's background, the reader is aware of how hard she has worked to deserve this jolly time, and based on every piece of information in the book we know she will continue working hard when she is married and settled. Again, this is a reflection of the position of many immigrant country girls of this time.

Book 2: Chapter 11

Book 2: Chapter 11 Summary

The reader is reminded that Wick Cutter is a moneylender, and that farmers who go to him are usually stuck returning often. Cutter is described as a man who makes donations to the Protestant church for sentimental reasons and that his roots in Iowa taught him to speak Swedish, which gave him an edge with the Scandinavian immigrants. Cutter is a poker player, has moral lessons for boys, and he is particularly nice to Jim's grandmother. Jim detests his baldhead and yellow whiskers. Cutter and his wife constantly fight, and Cutter rides his buggy at the racetrack. Mrs. Cutter has snapping eyes, long teeth and an angry face. She is very formal and paints china. Mrs. Cutter mails clippings to Mr. Cutter about unfaithful husbands and blames him for her being childless. Jim relates to the reader his understanding that the Cutters enjoy their endless quarreling.

Book 2: Chapter 11 Analysis

This chapter provides the reader valuable information about the reason Wick Cutter is hated and about his chaotic relationship with his wife. These people seem entirely despicable, and they are the people for whom the romanticized A'ntonia will be working.

Book 2: Chapter 12

Book 2: Chapter 12 Summary

When A'ntonia goes to work for the Cutters she seems to only care about parties, having a good time, and sewing herself nice clothes. A'ntonia, now wears very ladylike clothes and goes downtown to meet her friends almost every afternoon. Jim is a senior now and sometimes he visits with the girls downtown. Jim gets very mad one day when Tiny and the girls tease him about being a preacher some day. People gossip about how friendly Jim is with A'ntonia and her friends, yet shows no interest in girls his own age.

After the Vannis' dancing pavilion leaves, the interest in dancing does not entirely go away, but Jim does not attend dances in the Masonic Hall. Jim is moody again this winter and is bored with the people he knows and staying in Black Hawk. Jim wanders around looking for distractions. Once he is put out of Anton Jelinek's saloon because of Jelinek's respect for Jim's grandfather. Jim retells of going to the drugstore and depot looking for entertainment, but the one thing he looks forward to all week is the dance at the Firemen's Hall. Jim's grandparents do not approve of dancing, but Jim sneaks out of his bedroom after they are asleep.

The dances at the Firemen's Hall are like the dances at the Vannis' tent. Tony, Lena, Tiny, the three Marys and the Danish laundry girls are always there. Jim explains that the four Danish laundry girls live with the laundryman whose daughter died. The laundryman has been trying to make up for his daughter's death, and he treats his girls well. Jim describes dancing with Lena as slow and sultry while dancing with Tony is adventurous and fun. A'ntonia usually attends dances with a so-called ladies' man named Larry Donovan, but one night when he does not attend, Jim walks A'ntonia home and kisses her. A'ntonia is surprised at Jim's kiss and he responds that Lena lets him kiss her. A'ntonia is upset by this and wants the girls to leave him alone. Jim says A'ntonia will always treat him like a kid, and she agrees that she will, but that she is very fond of him. Jim is very enamored with A'ntonia and says, "She was still my A'ntonia." Jim has pleasant dreams after the dances once he falls asleep, and he retells a dream he has often of Lena snuggling beside him in a harvest field. Jim wishes he would dream of A'ntonia that way, but he never does.

Book 2: Chapter 12 Analysis

During another bleak winter, Jim is restless and finds comfort in his friendship with the country girls. The reader is aware that Jim is a senior in school, is growing into a young man, and will soon be making his own way in life. Despite his grandparents' rules, Jim goes to dances and finds his own independence. This parallels what A'ntonia has gone through with the Harlings, but in a more muted manner.

Book 2: Chapter 13

Book 2: Chapter 13 Summary

Jim wakes up to find his grandmother crying because she has heard of Jim going to the Firemen's Hall dances. People say Jim is growing up poorly, and it makes his grandparents look badly. Jim promises not to return to the Firemen's Hall. Jim continues in his lonesome way, and he gets a sad joy from making a May basket for Nina Harling. Jim walks home often with Frances and discusses his plans with her. Frances comments that Jim glamorizes the country girls and says, "The trouble with you, Jim, is that you're romantic."

Jim's commencement is approaching and Mrs. Harling plans to attend. Jim's oration is very impressive, and Mrs. Harling gives Jim a silk umbrella as a gift. On Jim's way home, Lena, Tony and another girl all tell Jim how wonderful his speech was. A'ntonia says it reminded her of her father, and Jim says he dedicated it to Mr. Shimerda which pleases A'ntonia. Jim thinks to him self, "I have had no other success that pulled at my heartstrings like that one."

Book 2: Chapter 13 Analysis

This chapter signifies another turning point in Jim's life during spring. He separates himself from the youthful dances and presents his commencement speech. From here, Jim will be leaving his youth behind to find his way in life. When Frances says that Jim is romantic, the reader knows this comes from his youthful point of view as much as from anything else. However, as an older man Jim writes this book, which is a memoir to A'ntonia and his romantic nature has not changed. The ending note of this chapter is bittersweet in that Jim has completed his commencement speech with memories of Mr. Shimerda whom Jim admired. This takes Jim, A'ntonia and the reader back to the youthfulness of the beginning of this novel.

Book 2: Chapter 14

Book 2: Chapter 14 Summary

After commencement, Jim begins studying seriously. Jim has only one holiday that summer when he, A'ntonia, Tiny, Lena and Anna Hansen go to the river to collect elder to make wine. Jim goes early to the river to swim, and the girls meet him there. Jim describes in vivid detail the sound of the water, the vegetation he sees and the contentment he feels.

A'ntonia says she feels homesick for Bohemia and tells Jim of how she used to listen to her father and his friend talking about music, God, and their youth. A'ntonia asks whether Jim thinks her father's spirit can go back to those places. Jim tells A'ntonia about his night at home by himself at his grandparents' home in the country when he felt Mr. Shimerda's spirit and that he was sure he had gone back to his own country. A'ntonia tells Jim about how her father married her mother, who was a poor girl working in his home, and that her grandmother never let her mother in the house again. A'ntonia says she remembers everything about her old town and country.

Lena shows up suddenly breaking up the discussion and says she has been looking for them. They all have lunch and the girls speak of their mothers and how hard it was for them to come to this new country and work on farms. The girls talk about what they buy for their families and how they try to support them. They talk of Selma Kronn who will be the first Scandinavian to teach at the high school. Lena tells of how her grandmother married a Lapp, and that all of the Norwegians up north are afraid their men will run after these women.

Everyone plays a game, and then Jim tells of how the Spanish first came to the area, and that even though they were taught that none had made it as far north as Nebraska, a farmer had found a sword with Spanish inscription and metal stirrup. They all speak of Coronado and how he died of a broken heart in the wilderness to which A'ntonia responds, "More than him has done that." They all sit looking off into the distance at the sun going down when they see an image of a plough with the sun behind it. Jim describes the image as " . . . heroic in size, a picture writing on the sun."

Book 2: Chapter 14 Analysis

This chapter reveals Jim having one last fling in the country before moving on to other things in life. It is only natural that discussions should go back to the old country life for this young group. The discussion about family reveals again the responsibilities these girls have to their families who are still working on the farms. The story of Coronado is again another parallel story to the immigrants who come to America on an adventure looking for new life. A'ntonia's words about the death of Coronado being from a broken heart are surely meant to describe her own father's death. The image of the plough in

the sunset is symbolic of the work the immigrants and country people have come to Nebraska to do, and it is a representation of their victory over the landscape in this new country and the success of their farms.

Book 2: Chapter 15

Book 2: Chapter 15 Summary

In late August, the Cutters go to Omaha for a few days, and A'ntonia visits with the Burdens. Jim's grandmother notices A'ntonia is worried and she then describes her peculiar situation. Before leaving, Cutter insisted that A'ntonia sleep in the house and placed the silver and a box of papers below her bed. A'ntonia is worried Cutter is up to a trick, and Grandmother agrees that she should not stay in the house. Grandmother arranges for Jim to sleep in the Cutters' house in place of A'ntonia. For two nights, Jim has no troubles; however, on the third night, Wick Cutter appears and sits on the edge of the bed. When Wick sees it is Jim there is a nasty fight, and Jim manages to get home. Jim keeps himself hidden in his room while his face and body recover. Jim is very upset by this incident and says he even hates A'ntonia for leading him to this. Jim's grandfather hears that Wick Cutter has left town again on a train and is beat up pretty badly as well.

Grandmother and A'ntonia go to the Cutters to pack A'ntonia's trunk, and they find the room in complete disorder. While the women are packing, Mrs. Cutter comes home and is furious. She tells the story about Cutter placing her on the wrong train headed for Kansas City purposefully and knowing that he was up to tricks. The Cutters' relationship is built upon Mrs. Cutter thinking Wick Cutter is no good and the entertainment they both get from quarreling.

Book 2: Chapter 15 Analysis

At last, the foreshadowing about Wick Cutter's evil deeds is played out in this chapter. Fortunately, for A'ntonia, the events that lead up to this incident with Wick Cutter leave her unharmed. However, Jim takes a beating in place of what could have happened to A'ntonia. Finally, it would seem that A'ntonia would have to be a bit more grown up in her decision making as well.

Book 3: Chapter 1

Book 3: Chapter 1 Summary

Jim is now at the University and he stays in Lincoln through his first summer. He is fortunate to befriend the young scholar Gaston Cleric, who has been sent West to improve his health. Apparently, Cleric suffered from a long-term illness in Italy that still affects him. Cleric and Jim are both in Lincoln over the summer, and Jim is working off a year's worth of Greek. Jim describes this phase of his life as a mental awakening in which he is introduced to the world of ideas, and his guide is Gaston Cleric. Despite everything new, bits of Jim's old life resurface still.

Jim describes his college life as free, and he has taken rooms with an elderly couple. Jim has two rooms; one was originally a linen closet and is now his unheated bedroom, and the other is his study. Sometimes, while Cleric is out walking he stops by to talk with Jim. Jim describes Cleric as having "narrowly missed being a great poet," for his talk could be poetic in nature when he was truly elated. Jim recalls Cleric's description of Paestum where he lingered at the sea temples and is the place he caught his fever. Another evening is spent with Cleric speaking of Virgil, *Commedia* and Dante. While Jim admires Cleric's scholarship, he knows that he would never be such a scholar. Speaking of this new material makes him recall the early figures of his past and they stand out to him like the image of the plough against the sunset.

Book 3: Chapter 1 Analysis

Jim's new infatuation of the classics and the young scholar Gaston Cleric is an introduction into his life at the University in Lincoln, Nebraska. However, throughout this short chapter we learn that Jim cannot leave his past entirely behind him. The people of the classics make Jim remember people like Jake, Otto and Russian Peter who are the people who form his early impressions of Nebraska. Jim has managed to take two very different worlds and combine them in his memory with his romantic notions.

Book 3: Chapter 2

Book 3: Chapter 2 Summary

One evening in March, Jim sits with his window open looking across the prairie, and stares at a page in *Georgics* that contains the line "*Optima dies . . . prima fugit,*" or the best days are the first to flee. Jim then ponders the meaning of "*Primus ego in patriam mecum . . . deducam Musas*", or, "for I shall be the first, if I live, to bring the Muse into my own country." Cleric interprets this last passage as a hope of Virgil's, for he came from a small town. Cleric believes that on Virgil's deathbed, he must have remembered these words, and he must have said thankfully that he was the first to call on the Muse and bring her to his small town.

While Jim is reflecting on all of this, Lena Linguard appears at the door. Apparently, she has moved to Lincoln to open a dressmaker's shop of her own. She is comfortable with Jim and seems to be her usual friendly self catching Jim up on her life and telling Jim she has been in Lincoln for a while. Jim asks about A'ntonia and learns that she works at the hotel for Mrs. Gardener and is now engaged to Larry Donovan, despite the warnings she gets about him from others. Lena invites Jim to visit her and leaves.

When Jim turns back to his room it seems friendlier to him, and upon thinking of Virgil reflects "If there were no girls like them [the country girls] in the world, there would be no poetry." Jim ends this chapter reconsidering the words "*Optima dies . . . prima fugit*" with a new perspective.

Book 3: Chapter 2 Analysis

If ever in this book Jim shows signs of being a romantic, this chapter is blazing with it. Jim's study of the classics causes him to again glamorize the life of the simple, hardworking, country people. The words, the best days are the first to flee, have powerful meaning after Lena's visit is over, for Jim truly feels what these words mean. His best days are gone and he lives now with the memory of his early days in Nebraska. In addition, Willa Cather has woven in Virgil's invocation of the Muse with such smoothness, that the reader feels now that Jim is the writer of his own small town. We are faced with knowing that Jim's retelling of his life and the lives of the people around him are parallel with the work of Virgil. This is a subtle climactic and cathartic part of this novel in which all of the anecdotes, memorable characters, and tragic and happy events suddenly make sense in the context of the larger, literary world.

Book 3: Chapter 3

Book 3: Chapter 3 Summary

Jim describes going to several shows at the theater with Lena who is enthralled with them. The show *Camille* really grabs Jim's attention and emotions. Jim describes this experience as being invited into an enchanting, lavish world with beautifully dressed men and women. Although Jim describes the main actress who plays Marguerite as being old and overly dramatic, Jim is emotionally involved in the lovers' pain when Marguerite questions her Armand. Jim is in tears along with Lena by the end of the play. Jim walks Lena home in the rain, and is in deep contemplation and sadness for the heroine Marguerite Gauthier, and comments that this play is always put on in April.

Book 3: Chapter 3 Analysis

We learn that Jim is spending time taking Lena out in the evenings, and it is not coincidental that the play *Camille* is about two lovers who quarrel. The retelling of this play is a foreshadowing of where Jim's relationship with Lena is headed. Despite how much they enjoy each other's company, the relationship will not last, as we will learn in a later chapter.

Book 3: Chapter 4

Book 3: Chapter 4 Summary

Jim describes waiting in Lena's formal parlor and her success at being a dressmaker, despite the fact that she never finishes work on time or within the designated budget. Jim sometimes meets Lena downtown and has Sunday breakfasts with her. Jim describes playing with Lena's dog, her quaint use of American expressions, and how pretty she looks in the mornings. Once, Jim and Lena talk of Ole Benson, and Lena states that there was never any harm to him. Lena describes how he spoke in Norwegian and showed her his tattoos. Lena says he married his wife because he thought she was the only person who could keep him steady.

The Polish violin teacher who lives across the hall from Lena dislikes Jim's visits. Old Colonel Raleigh, Lena's landlord, and this Polish violin teacher both adore Lena and resent one another. One day the violin teacher stops by asking for pins, and while Lena fixes his waistcoat, he asks Jim what his intentions are with Lena. After Jim assures him they are honorable and that he has known Lena since childhood, the man treats him more civilly.

At this time, Jim comments that Lena has come between him and his studies. Gaston Cleric suggests that Jim accompany him to Harvard to complete his classes telling Jim that with Lena around Jim will never work seriously. Cleric has already communicated with Jim's grandfather and received his permission for Jim to attend Harvard. Jim visits Lena the next evening, and discovers that the colonel has proposed numerous times to Lena. Lena states that she will never marry and explains that she had enough of family life as a child and does not want a husband. Jim then tells her of his plans to move away, and Lena seems regretful that she began her relationship with Jim. Jim and Lena say their goodbyes on different occasions before Jim abruptly leaves Lincoln, visits his grandparents for a few weeks and joins Cleric in Boston.

Book 3: Chapter 4 Analysis

Once again, we have the ending of a chapter in Jim's life. He has had his romantic fling with the world of ideas and Lena Linguard, and he is now moving on to some other endeavor. He moves further and further away from that part of his life, the country, which has so greatly influenced him. The foreshadowing of the story of *Camille* shows the ended relationship between Jim and Lena that is unlikely to be rekindled.

Book 4: Chapter 1

Book 4: Chapter 1 Summary

Jim finishes his degree at Harvard over the next two years, and before he enters law school, he goes home for summer vacation. His first night at home, Mrs. Harling, Sally and Frances come over to visit him. Jim learns of what has happened to A'ntonia. A'ntonia went away to marry Larry Donovan, but he deserted her and now she has a baby and has gone back home to her family. Jim is disappointed that A'ntonia has turned out this way while Lena Linguard, whom everyone thought poorly of, is now successful. The story of Tiny Soderball comes out as well.

Everyone knows that Tiny has gone west to open a sailor's boardinghouse. However, what actually has happened to Tiny is that she went to Alaska after gold was found and set up a hotel. One winter a Swede stayed in her hotel and deeded her his claim before his death. After ten years in Alaska, Tiny moved to San Francisco as a rich lady. Jim recalls meeting her in Salt Lake City in 1908 and describes her as a hard-faced woman who reminds him of Mrs. Gardener. Tiny has persuaded Lena to move to San Francisco, and Lena makes sure Tiny stays well dressed. Tiny has also lost three toes in Alaska and walks with a slight limp.

Book 4: Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter is an introduction into the major life changes of the main characters. At this point, we only know the basic pieces of information, and we are sure to learn more. The news about Tiny is surprising, and this is the first time in the entire book that Jim has described her much.

Book 4: Chapter 2

Book 4: Chapter 2 Summary

Jim persuades his grandparents to get their photographs taken. While waiting for them, Jim looks at the pictures on the wall trying to recognize people. One of the pictures, which Jim describes as depressing, happens to be A'ntonia's baby. Jim thinks to himself that he should see A'ntonia again and comments on her poor choice in Larry Donovan. Larry we learn is a passenger conductor who is cool and distant with men, but with women he tells of his mistake in not entering the office branch and how unappreciated he is. Larry's manipulation manages to engage married and single women. That same morning as the photography session, Jim asks Mrs. Harling for details about how A'ntonia's marriage fell through. Mrs. Harling sends Jim to speak with the Widow Steavens, the woman who lives in the Burden's old home, for she was there for A'ntonia at that time.

Book 4: Chapter 2 Analysis

In this chapter, we learn that Jim still thinks of A'ntonia and his wishes to see her. The description of Larry Donovan is the most in depth of the book until now. We know he is a ladies' man, and now we learn his sly trick with women pleading his rotten case for their affection. It is understandable that Jim detests him so much. We also know that Jim will be seeking out more information as to what has happened to A'ntonia.

Book 4: Chapter 3

Book 4: Chapter 3 Summary

On August first or second, Jim goes to visit the Widow Steavens. Jim explains that the wheat harvest is over and threshing has begun. Jim sees wooden houses and red barns, which represent happy families. Jim describes the fertile earth and recalls all of the hard work that has gone into it. Jim describes the Widow Steavens as tall, brown and very strong. The Widow Steavens invites Jim to stay the night so she can tell Jim about A'ntonia after her work is done.

After supper, Jim and Mrs. Steavens go to the old sitting room to talk. Mrs. Steavens tells Jim of how A'ntonia came to her home every day do her sewing for her marriage and would sit happily singing in Bohemian. A'ntonia had linens, lace, and even silver spoons and forks. A'ntonia received letters from Larry often, and A'ntonia was troubled when she got a letter saying they had to move to Denver. A'ntonia did not think she could be a city girl, but she cheered up despite her waiting. In March, A'ntonia packs and finally takes a train to Denver. Ambrosch gives her three hundred dollars when he sends her off.

After a while, the family receives a letter from A'ntonia saying she and Larry would get married after his promotion in a few days. Then the family receives a postcard saying she is well, and then they hear nothing. One night A'ntonia comes home, and Mrs. Steavens goes over to visit. The women were in the middle of washing all of A'ntonia's linens, and A'ntonia goes out to tell Mrs. Steavens what has happened. A'ntonia has come home unmarried because Larry Donovan ran off. He had been fired for knocking down fares and he lived with A'ntonia until her money ran out. A'ntonia suspects Larry has gone to Mexico. Mrs. Steavens asks why A'ntonia did not ask for a civil marriage, and she responds that she thought if Larry saw how well she could do for him he would stay with her. Mrs. Steavens goes on to tell Jim how heartbroken she was that A'ntonia has come home disgraced.

A'ntonia works like a man in the fields for her brother Ambrosch. We learn Marek became violent and was institutionalized. People respect A'ntonia's hard work and that she stays to herself. Sometimes Mrs. Steavens would see A'ntonia when she was out herding the cattle. One day in December, Mrs. Steavens noticed how late A'ntonia was getting home with the cattle and how heavy her steps were. That night A'ntonia had her baby, and Mrs. Shimerda came and asked for Mrs. Steavens' help. Mrs. Steavens helped clean the baby and noticed how angry Ambrosch is. Mrs. Steavens warned Ambrosch that she intends to keep an eye on the baby to make sure no harm comes to it. Mrs. Steavens tells of how good a mother A'ntonia is. Jim describes sleeping that night as though he was a little boy again with the window open.

Book 4: Chapter 3 Analysis

During the chapter the reader and Jim learns of the hardship that befalls A'ntonia. Surprisingly, at the end of the chapter Jim does not have much of a response to A'ntonia's story. The reader is aware of the contradiction between Jim returning to his childhood home and hearing a very sad, adult story about a close friend.

Book 4: Chapter 4

Book 4: Chapter 4 Summary

The next day, Jim goes to visit A'ntonia. Jims says, "We met like the people in the old song, in silence, if not in tears." A'ntonia says she has been expecting Jim to visit. A'ntonia is very thin and looks worn down by her work, yet her face at 24 still has color and health in it. Jim and A'ntonia go to talk by the plot where Mr. Shimerda is buried. Jim begins telling A'ntonia about studying law and working with one of his mother's relatives in a law office in New York City. A'ntonia tells Jim about how much her father is a part of her life and that she knows she will not lose Jim either. A'ntonia goes on to say that she knows her job in life is to take care of her daughter. Jim responds by telling A'ntonia how much he thinks about her and says she is a part of him.

A'ntonia and Jim see the sun setting and the moon rising at the same time. Jim describes how everything in sight becomes clearer, and he wishes he could be a little boy again. Jim holds A'ntonia's hand to his heart and looks into her face and says he will come back to visit her. As Jim walks back, he imagines a little boy and girl running along side of him.

Book 4: Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter is a very heart-wrenching chapter. We see very clearly how intimate the relationship between A'ntonia and Jim has been for all these years and that it will be so in the future as well. The symbolic meeting by Mr. Shimerda's grave is a reflection of what these two people have come through together. Jim's line to A'ntonia, "I'd have liked to have you for a sweetheart, or a wife, or my mother or my sister – anything that a woman can be to a man," reveals that their relationship is far more than romantic.

Book 5: Chapter 1

Book 5: Chapter 1 Summary

Jim does not go to see A'ntonia for twenty years. Jim has heard she married Anton Jelinek's cousin, and that she is poor and has a very large family with eleven children. Jim visits A'ntonia's native village in Bohemia and sends A'ntonia photographs. Tiny Soderball tells Jim that life has been hard for A'ntonia. Jim says cowardice and the fear of finding A'ntonia old and broken kept him from visiting. Jim says he visits A'ntonia because of Lena Linguard. Jim was in San Francisco visiting Tiny and Lena, when Lena urged Jim to visit A'ntonia.

On Jim's way, east he stops to visit A'ntonia and first comes across two of her boys who are looking over a dead dog. The boys escort Jim up to the Cuzak house and another boy ties Jim's team for him. Jim describes the farm animals and an older girl who admits him into the house. A'ntonia comes in and stands before Jim, and he describes her as brown with grizzled curly hair. Jim is shocked, but soon adjusts to A'ntonia's older looks when he recognizes her eyes. At first A'ntonia does not recognize Jim, but when she does she is excited and calls all of her children to meet him. A'ntonia tells Jim that her family knows all about him, how surprised she is to see him, and how young he looks. A young boy, Jan, tells A'ntonia about the dead dog. A'ntonia says she does not speak English much anymore and she speaks to her children in Bohemian.

The family shows Jim their fruit cave and A'ntonia talks about how much food it takes to feed her family. Jim sees A'ntonia's orchard and she tells him of how much work it was to grow. A'ntonia tells of how she does not like guns anymore now that she is a mother. She also tells of how they got their land when it was so cheap, and that the first ten years were a struggle and her husband knew little about farming. A'ntonia's daughter Martha is married and has a baby of her own. A'ntonia says she is happy with her family, and she does not regret her life in town because of all she learned. A'ntonia wants Jim to stay the night so he can meet her husband the next day.

Jim tells A'ntonia's boys how pretty and well liked their mother was, and they respond proudly that they already know that. Everyone sits down to supper, and afterwards they listen to music by the children and look through old photographs. Jim and A'ntonia talk about the people they knew, and Jim is surprised to see an old photo of him, Jake and Otto. Finally, Jim goes out to the barn with the boys to sleep, but he lays awake for a while. At one point, he realizes that "She [Antonia] lent herself to immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct as universal and true." Jim goes on to describe A'ntonia's strong spirit and heart.

Book 5: Chapter 1 Analysis

Jim finally visits A'ntonia after twenty years. He finds A'ntonia has aged and changed, yet underneath it all, her enduring spirit remains strong. The stories he has heard about her large family and the hard work on the farm have been true. The physical work of her life has worn down her body, but she finds happiness in her family and in her farm. Jim's visit has given him insight yet again into the enduring spirit of A'ntonia and he seems charmed again by her and her life. This is another example of A'ntonia being described as heroic in nature.

Book 5: Chapter 2

Book 5: Chapter 2 Summary

Jim wakes to find A'ntonia's mischievous son Leo tickling his brother Ambrosch. Jim goes into the house and sees that breakfast is ready. A'ntonia tells Jim that lunch will be at noon and they will have geese for supper with her husband. A'ntonia talks of Martha, whom she wishes Jim could meet, and how much she cried when her oldest daughter was married. A'ntonia's husband comes home, and Jim describes him as crumpled, carrying one shoulder higher than the other, and very lively. Cuzak describes the carnival he and Rudolph, A'ntonia's oldest son, saw in the city. Jim describes how comfortable the couple seems together as Cuzak tells A'ntonia about people in Bohemian, and that he has an unusual trait of looking at people sidewise. Cuzak brought home small gifts and candy for his family, and he watches them amusedly.

Eventually, discussion turns to the Cutters. Rudolph tells the story of how the Cutters fought increasingly as they got older about where their property would go. Wick Cutter was horrified at the idea of Mrs. Cutter's family getting their money. To prevent this from happening, Cutter shot Mrs. Cutter and then himself to make sure that he outlived her. Cutter called the authorities himself to prove he outlived his wife. The Cutters' final worth was estimated to be over a hundred thousand dollars.

Cuzak and Jim go for a stroll, and Cuzak tells Jim his life's story of how he went to work in Vienna and eventually New York. Later, he went to work raising oranges in Florida when he caught malaria. He later came to Nebraska to look around, saw A'ntonia, and married her immediately. Cuzak tells Jim of how hard it was on the farm in the beginning, but A'ntonia made him stick it out. Cuzak says one day he would like to go back to Bohemia and Vienna, and jokes about being a city man. The chapter ends with Cuzak wondering about how it has been 26 years since he has been in Europe.

Book 5: Chapter 2 Analysis

Jim spends another day with the Cuzaks and sees again what a happy life A'ntonia has made for herself. Meeting Cuzak in this chapter shows again the connection between the Bohemian immigrants, and we are reminded again how difficult starting out as a farmer in Nebraska is. However, the Cuzak family has endured and now the fruits of their hard work are revealing themselves.

Book 5: Chapter 3

Book 5: Chapter 3 Summary

After dinner the next day, Jim takes a train to Black Hawk. The whole family says goodbye, and Jim has invited the two older boys on a hunting trip with him in the fall. Jim describes his day in Black Hawk as disappointing. Most of his old friends have died or have moved. Jim takes a walk out into the pastures and feels at home again there. Jim describes having escaped the depression of small towns, and looks forward to spending time with the Cuzaks. Jim happens to pass over a part of the first road that had run from the town to the North Country where his grandparents' farm was. This road was the same one Jim and A'ntonia had taken as children when they first came to Black hawk. Jim says, "For A'ntonia and for me, this had been the road of Destiny; had taken us to those early accidents of fortune which predetermined for us all that we can ever be." Jim ends the book by saying that no matter what he and A'ntonia have missed they share the past with one another.

Book 5: Chapter 3 Analysis

The novel ends by returning the reader to where it began – with two young children beginning their lives in Nebraska. The closing descriptions and comments echo the motif of the shared destiny and life Jim and A'ntonia have had together. There are also hints of the romanticism of country life and the effect of the landscape on people.

Characters

Mrs. Emmaline Burden

Jim's sturdy grandmother runs an orderly, proper household, a counterpoint to the Shimerda's animal-like cave. Awareness of differences makes her generally tolerant and concerned. The narrow attitudes of the Norwegians who won't let Mr. Shimerda be buried in their cemetery offend her: "If these foreigners are so clannish, Mr. Bushy, we'll have to have an American graveyard that will be more liberal-minded." But she has her own biases. She is contemptuous of Mrs. Shimerda's gift of dried mushrooms, declaring "I shouldn't want to eat anything that had been shut up for months with old clothes and goose pillows." And she is conventional too. She worries that people will say she hasn't brought Jim up correctly because he dances with the country girls. And when he is at school, she informs him only of those friends she approves of She does not let him know that Lena Lingard is in Lincoln.

Grandmother Burden

See Mrs. Emmaline Burden

Grandfather Burden

See Mr. Burden

Jim Burden

As narrator, Jim Burden is Cather's persona that is, he serves as a stand-in for the author. He comes to Nebraska at about the same age and time that Cather moved west with her family; he lives on a farm for a time with his grandparents just as Cather did; and Jim's neighbors, the Shimerdas, may have been inspired by the Cathers' Bohemian neighbors, the Sadileks. As an adult, Jim Burden returns to Nebraska just as Cather returned to Red Cloud and visited her friend Annie Sadilek, who was then surrounded by a large brood of children and happily married to a Czech farmer (Cuzak in the novel).

Jim is not merely Cather's voice. He is a full-bodied character with a nature and point of view of his own. Although sensitive, dreamy, and somewhat alienated, he is also conventional, a product of his own social class and family aspirations. But it is not simply class attitudes that keep a wedge between him and Antonia. He is at turns intrigued by Antonia's will-power and vitality and disgusted by her strong headedness and outspoken nature. People talk about him, that there is something strange about his lack of interest in girls of his own age and class and his lively relationships with the hired girls, the daughters of immigrants. Yet, once scolded by his grandmother, he stops socializing with them at the dances. While attending college in Lincoln, he starts a relationship with Lena Lingard. Yet he accepts her declaration that she will never marry

and he eventually marries someone else. Returning to Black Hawk, he learns of Antonia's betrayal by Larry Donovan. Bothered that she apparently threw herself away so cheaply, he is also aware how much she means to him. Again, he goes away. This time he does not see her for another twenty years. By then, seeing Antonia in the midst of her large family, Jim realizes the sterility of his own life and marriage and the vitality that is symbolized by Antonia. However, despite his admiration for and familiarity with Antonia, he cannot come any closer to her than as a sympathetic observer.

Mr. Burden

Grandfather Burden is reserved, dignified, but occasionally outspoken. Religious and broadminded, he accepts that "The prayers of all good people are good." Grandfather does not join the feud between his hired men and the Shimerdas and continues to help Ambrosch and Antonia with advice and materials.

Gaston Cleric

Jim's Latin teacher in Lincoln awakens his mind and makes the classics come alive for him. Jim believes that Cleric "narrowly missed being a great poet," but spends all his creative energy in his lectures. It is on his account that Jim goes to Harvard.

Curly Peter

See Peter

Wick Cutter

The Black Hawk moneylender fleeces Russian Peter and many others. He talks of his religious nature and contributions to Protestant churches, yet is known as a gambler and womanizer. His crafty plot to assault Antonia, who comes to work for him and his wife, is thwarted by Mrs. Burden and Jim.

Wycliffe Cutter

See Wick Cutter

Anton Cuzak

Antonia's husband had made several bad decisions in his youth in Vienna and in America. He finally comes to Black Hawk to visit his cousin, Anton Jelinek. When he meets Antonia, he finds exactly the kind of girl he had always wanted. Lena thinks he is the perfect partner for Antonia: "He isn't a hustler, but a rough man would never have

suited Tony." Anton also' loves Ins children and has an artistic sense; he is very fond of music, just as Antonia's father was.

Antonia Cuzak

See Antonia Shimerda

Blind Samson d'Arnault

Blind d' Amault, a Negro musician, comes to Black Hawk. He was born in the South, "where the spirit If not the fact of slavery persisted," but was given encouragement by his white mistress after his incredible musical talent was discovered. His music brings excitement to Jim's life and contrasts to the dull Nebraska winter. Jim thinks when d' Arnault plays he looks like an "African god of pleasure."

Otto Fuchs

Otto, the Burden's hired hand, is an Austrian immigrant who has been a cowboy, a stage-driver, a bartender, and a miner. He impresses Jim with his Jesse James-look and regales him with stories of outlaws and desperadoes. Like Jake, he is a hard worker with nothing to show for it. When the Burdens move to town, Otto goes out West in search of Ins fortune and, except for one letter, is not heard from again.

Mrs. Molly Gardener

Owner of Black Hawk's hotel, Mrs. Gardener is the best-dressed woman in town but "seemed indifferent to her possessions," as Jim says. Nevertheless, she is cold and rare is the guest who is given the privilege of speaking with her. She runs the business while her mild-mannered husband greets guests. It is while she is out of town that there is an impromptu dance at the hotel with Blind d' Amault playing.

Charley Harling

The only Harling son, older than Jim by two years, Charley is indulged and is a favorite of Antonia, a fact that makes Jim jealous. He goes to Annapolis and serves on a battleship.

Mr. Christian Harling

A grain merchant and cattle-buyer who lives next door to the Burdens in Black Hawk, Mr. Harling is autocratic and imperial. His reputation as the town's leading businessman helps persuade Ambrosch to allow Antonia to work for the family

When he catches a boy trying to kiss Antonia, he has Mrs. Harling issue an ultimatum that she must quit the dances or leave the Harling's house.

Frances Harling

The oldest Harling daughter, Frances helps her father in his business, is familiar with all the farm people, and has a keen eye for both business and people. As Jim's friend she tells him, "I expect I know the country girls better than you do. You always put a kind of glamour over them. The trouble with you, Jim, is that you're a romantic"

Mrs. Harling

The town neighbor of the Burdens, Mrs. Harling is encouraged to hire Antonia. Jim describes a basic harmony between the two; despite their different backgrounds, they are both strong-willed, loving, down-to-earth women Antonia flourishes at the Burdens and learns how to run a household and to be a good mother. Mrs. Harling is very hurt when Antonia chooses to leave the Harling family III order to keep attending the Saturday night dances However, she does not try to change the mind of either her husband or Antonia, and eventually forgives her. As Jim Burden describes her, she is "quick to anger, quick to laughter, and Jolly from the depths of her soul."

Anton Jelinek

A young Bohemian settler, Jelinek comes to help his fellow countrymen after Mr. Shimerda's death. "Everything about him was warm and spontaneous," Jim says, and he impresses the Burdens with a tale of religious faith from his youth. It is his cousin, Anton Cusak, who comes to Black Hawk and marries the disgraced Antonia.

Peter Krajiek

The first Bohemian settler in Black Hawk, Krajiek provides land and supplies for the Shimerdas' homestead-at a grossly inflated price. Krajiek takes advantage of the family in every way he can, even though he is distantly related to Mrs. Shimerda. After Mr. Shimerda's suicide, Krajiek "behaved like a guilty man," and Jim believes he may feel some remorse in addition to his fear.

Lena Lingard

Norwegian-born Lena is one of the "hired girls," Immigrant daughters who work in Black Hawk to earn money for their farm families. Outgoing and pretty, she is both a friend and rival of Antonia's. While working III Lincoln as a dressmaker, she diverts Jim from Ins college studies. Although his relationship with her matures him, he returns East to attend Harvard. Never married, Lena is a flirt who gives her heart away but keeps her

head for business. Her experiences helping her mother run the household as a child have decided her against marriage: "I' ve seen a good deal of married life, and I don't care for it." She becomes a successful dressmaker and even as an older woman remains stylish. It is Lena who persuades Jim to visit Antonia after twenty years.

Sylvester Lovett

Sylvester, a cashier at his father's bank, also prefers the Saturday night dances with the hired girls. He was especially crazy about Lena. Jim says, "In my ingenuousness I hoped that Sylvester would marry Lena, and thus give all the country girls a better position in town." When he marries a respectable widow instead, Jim is contemptuous of him.

Jake Marpole

Jake is the farmhand who accompanies Jim on his train ride from Virginia to Nebraska. An illiterate and provincial "mountain boy," he thinks foreigners spread diseases. Lured by Otto's tales of western wealth, Jake thinks a silver mine is waiting for him in Colorado When the Burdens move to town, he follows his dream there. Otto's letter from the Yankee Girl Mine tells that Jake has recuperated from mountain fever, but when Jim writes back, the letter is returned unclaimed.

Pavel

Sickly and sad, Pavel's "generally excited and rebellious manner" supports rumors that he was once an anarchist. On his death bed, Pavel tells Mr. Shimerda about a crime he committed in his youth. In Russia, he had saved his own life by throwing his friends, a new bride and groom, from a sleigh to hungry wolves that chased them. This led him and Peter to come to America. Shortly after this confession, Pavel dies from a strain brought on by hard labor.

Peter

One of the two Russian men whose farm Mr. Shimerda visits. Short, curly-haired, bow-legged, and as "fat as butter," he is friendly and shares his milk and garden produce with the Shimerdas. He loves his new country, where anyone who can care for a cow can own one-not just rich men. He is deeply in debt to Wick Cutter, and shortly after his friend Pavel's death, must sell his farm to pay his mortgage Peter ends up leaving America to work as a railway cook.

Rooshian Peter

See Peter

Russian Peter

See Peter

Ambrosch Shimerda

The oldest of the four Shimerda children, Ambrosch is ambitious and hardworking. He works Antonia hard and sometimes rents her out to other farmers. When she goes to work for the Harlings, Ambrosch tries to get her entire salary sent to him. Although he is not a generous man, he is deeply concerned for his father and spends money on masses for him. One of Antonia's sons is named after her brother Ambrosch.

Antonia Shimerda

Antonia is fourteen when she first meets Jim and gives him a ring. Her warmth and impulsiveness are immediately evident, the very characteristics that both intrigue and frighten Jim. She is both a realist and a loyalist, who makes excuses for her mother's behavior but does not complain about her. Her father wants to develop her loftier side: "Tee-ach, te-e-ach my An-tonia!" he tells Mrs. Burden. But his suicide puts an end to such refined aspirations. Antonia's hardy side is developed instead. She works in the fields, proud to be competing with men. Her physicality makes her great; she belongs to the earth. At the end of Book One, Antonia corrects Jim's blindness to their difference in circumstance: "If I live here, like you, that is different. Things will be easy for you. But they will be hard for us."

Hired out to the Harlings, she learns how things are done in a well-ordered American home, things her own overwhelmed and disappointed mother could not have taught her. A basic harmony exists between Antonia and Mrs. Harling: they have strong, independent natures, and they know what they like. They both love children, animals, and music, as well as rough play and digging in the earth. As Jim says "Deep down in each of them there was a kind of hearty joviality, a relish of life, not over-delicate, but very invigorating." But Antonia is young, high-tempered, and stubborn. When she has to choose between her work at the Harlings and dancing, she chooses dancing. "A girl like me has got to take her good times when she can. Maybe there won't be any tent next year. I guess I want to have my fling, like the other girls."

Pregnant, Antonia is abandoned at the altar by the worthless Larry Donovan. Decades later, when Jim returns for a visit, he finds her the mother of a large, loving, demonstrative family Falling asleep in the barn, he thinks, "Antonia had always been one to leave images in the mind that did not fade... She lent herself to immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct as universal and true. She was a battered woman now, not a lovely girl; but she still had that something which fires the Imagination.... All the strong things of her heart came out in her body. She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races."

Mr. Shimerda

Mr. Shimerda, with his iron-gray hair, well-shaped hands, and silk neck cloth, has a genteel, dignified bearing, a shadow from a different world. He was a musician, older and of higher social rank than his wife, whom he married honorably. Mr. Shimerda would have preferred to remain in Bohemia, where he made a good living and was well respected, *but* his wife insisted the family move to America, where opportunity is greater. After Mr. Shimerda dies, Jim imagines his spirit traveling back to Ins much-loved homeland. While Mrs. Shimerda favors Arnbrosch, Mr. Shimerda feels closest to Antonia. Considerate and well-groomed even in his suicide, Mr. Shimerda's memory is cherished by both Antonia and Jim throughout their lives.

Mrs. Shimerda

When we first meet Antonia's mother, she is hugging her trunk "as if it *were* a baby." Possessions are dear to her and she bears the deprivations of immigrant life poorly. "A conceited, boastful old thing," as Jim calls her, is not even humbled by misfortune; nevertheless she is capable of gratitude.

She gives Mrs. Burden mushrooms, a hoarded treasure brought from Bohemia; but poignantly, what she values has no worth at all to Americans. Typically, when Mrs. Shimerda almost washes Antonia's baby with harsh soap, we don't know whether to attribute her action to ignorance, to disregard, or even to hostility. It is as Mrs. Burden says, "A body never knows what traits poverty might bring out in 'ern."

Tony Shimerda

See Antonia Shimerda

Tiny Soderball

Another hired girl, Tiny works at the Boys' Home Hotel In Black Hawk. She starts a lodging house in Seattle and later helps found Dawson City during the gold rush in Alaska. After a Swede whom she had befriended died and left his claim to her, she returned a rich woman to San Francisco. *But* by then, Tiny had lost the ability to be interested in anything.

Mrs. Vanni

Along with her husband, Mrs. Vanni brings the trends and style of the world to Black Hawk. The excitement generated in their dance pavilion affects all the groups in town: the town ladies send their daughters to Mrs. Vanni's dancing classes, while the country girls and boys and working men enjoy the nightly dances. The Progressive Euchre Club

arranges exclusive use of the tent on Tuesday and Friday nights but Jim prefers Saturday nights, when the country boys and girls joined the hired girls.

Themes

Change and Transformation

Willa Cather's straightforward story of Antonia Shimerda, a Bohemian immigrant to Nebraska, parallels the change in the lives of the two principal characters with the transformation of the Great Plains. Antonia is fourteen when we first see her; Jim Burden ten. Both have been wrenched from their origins, Antonia from her native Bohemia, Jim from Ins parents' home in Virginia. She is an immigrant. He is an orphan. It is no surprise we encounter them first in motion on a train. They are carried through an empty land. "There seemed to be nothing to see; no fences, no creeks or trees, no hills or fields. There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made." That first ride is in sharp contrast with Jim's tram crossing as an adult, when the "train flashed through never-ending miles of ripe wheat, by country towns and bright-flowered pastures and oak groves wilting in the sun." Antonia has become the mother of a large family, and Jim is a successful Eastern lawyer, childless and unhappily married. Jim takes a long walk out of Black Hawk: "I had the good luck to stumble upon a bit of the first road. Everywhere else it had been

ploughed under when the highways were surveyed; this half-mile or so within the pasture fence was all that was left of that old road which used to run like a wild thing across the open prairie. This was the road which Antonia and I came on that night when we got off the train at Black Hawk and were bedded down in the straw, wondering children, being taken we knew not whither."

American Dream

The novel is populated predominantly by immigrants and the successes and failures of the American Dream are manifest. What drove people to make the long haul across oceans and then across the continent? Some came because they were ambitious. Mrs. Shimerda uprooted her family against her husband's wishes. She said, "America big country, much money, much land for my boys, much husband for my girls.'" Anton Cuzak seems to have drifted to Nebraska to keep away from the bad luck and trouble he seemed to have attracted in the past. Pavel and Peter were fugitives. The burgeoning country and economy provided many opportunities. The immigrant farmers hire out their daughters to the townspeople. Anton Jelinek rented his homestead and ran a saloon in town. Tiny Soderball follows the frontier to Seattle and then, during the gold rush, to Alaska. The Vannis take their musical talents and dancing tent on the road. And, as always, swindlers and loan sharks, like Wick Cutter, preyed on the weak. The immigrants pay an enormous price for these opportunities. The differences in language, occupation, and geography created hardships. '"It must have been a trial for our mothers,' said Lena, 'coming out here and having to do everything different. My mother always lived in town. She says she started behind in farmwork, and never has caught up.'" There is loss of social status. Even Jim, who prefers the hired girls, is aware they

are not of his own set. Marriage to Lena or Antonia is not even a consideration. And for many, there is homesickness. Antonia says "I ain't never forgot my own country.'" For some the price seems materially worth It. Lena *is* a successful dressmaker in San Francisco. Tiny owns a house there and is wealthy, although soured. Antonia and her husband flourish. For all the successes, the novel is riddled with his appointments and failures. Otto and Jake go west, and except for one postcard, they are never heard of again. "Rooshian" Peter, who proudly told Antonia that "in his country only rich people had cows, but here any man could have one who would take care of her," loses his brother and bankruptcy forces him to sell his possessions. When Jim tells Antonia that Coronado, who searched the American west for the Seven Golden Cities, rued in the wilderness of a broken heart, she sighs, "More than him has done that." The American Dream had also broken her father.

Difference

It is through the eyes of Jim Burden, an orphan and thus something of an outsider himself, that Willa Cather considers differences of class, nationality, and gender. Even before young Jim arrives in Nebraska, he is met with prejudice against foreigners. Jake thinks that foreigners spread diseases. But Cather makes it clear that prejudice was not invented in America. Otto tells Mrs. Burden, "Bohemians has a natural distrust of Austrians.'" And Norwegian Lena feels fated by the Lapp blood of her paternal grandmother. "I guess that's what's the matter with me; they say Lapp blood will out." Throughout the novel, Jim himself is a perpetrator of pervading prejudices and conventions. As a boy, he is indignant that Antonia, a girl, should have a superior attitude toward him. After his success in killing a snake wins her admiration, he cannot help insulting her, "What did you jabber Bohunk for?" *My Antonia* is not simply a study in human difference but in the destiny that binds us into the human condition. Stargazing with Antonia, Jim muses, "Though we had come from such different parts of the world, in both of us there was some dusky superstition that those shining groups have their influences upon what is and what is not to be."

Coming of Age

My Antonia is a *bildungsroman,* or coming-of-age story, that traces Jim Burden's development from the age of ten. It begins when he is orphaned and newly transplanted to IDS grandparents' farm in Nebraska, where he first feels erased and blotted out. His escape into romanticism first takes the form of a young boy's fascination with outlaws, such as Jesse James, and lost adventurers, such as the SWISS Family Robinson As an adolescent, he remains estranged although conventional. Bored by the sameness of his small, pioneer town, he is intrigued by the romantic foreignness of the hired girls, girls he will never marry, and he keeps away from girls that would be suitable for him. As an adult, he remains virtually without a real home. His marriage is childless; he and his wife live almost separate lives, IDS being a life of travel on the railway through the land that he loves.

Memory and Reminiscence

The novel has a rich aura of nostalgia and evokes a departed grandeur of a vast land that had once been a sea of red grass in motion. There is a sense of longing and homesickness that accompanies the characters as they move on in their lives. Antonia misses the flowers and the woodland pathways of her homeland. Life-hardened Otto carries Christmas-tree ornaments from Austria in his trunk

The age-old prejudices that have been brought from Europe are familiar relics and, being so, are hard to relinquish. Antonia's big box of pictures seems to be a container of this past, a past she has managed to pass on to her children. "Antonia herself had always been one to leave images in the mind that did not fade-that grew stronger with time." Jim has his own stores of pictures in his mind's memory. And he consoles himself by saying, "Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past."

Style

Point of View

My Antonia is at once the story of Antonia Shimerda, a Bohemian immigrant to the Great Plains in the 1880s, and the story of Jim Burden, the narrator who creates his own image of Antonia. As Jim's memoirs, the novel is the re-creation of a middle-aged lawyer whose failed marriage leaves him unloved and alone. His childhood in Nebraska becomes, in retrospect, the happiest time of his life, the period of potential and expectancy before the disappointments of adulthood. The rose color cast and purple rhapsodies are products of this sentimental and romantic look backward. Ironically, despite the revisionist representation, it is clear that even as a child Jim is already alienated, different, orphaned. This use of a male narrator is typical in Cather's writing and has attracted much critical attention. It may account for Jim's inability to make Antonia his girlfriend or wife, even though he clearly loves her. *My Antonia* is also Willa Cather's story of children discovering the beauties and terrors of a vast new country and of themselves. While Antonia emerges as an equally strong character, she is observed only from the outside. As Cather told a friend, she wanted her heroine to be "like a rare object in the middle of a table, which one may examine from all sides ... because she is the story "

Setting

Deeply rooted in a sense of time and place, Cather evokes the shaggy virgin prairie around Red Cloud, Nebraska. During the late nineteenth century, immigrants helped populate this new land. The novel has been said to be a tapestry in the colors of the land that Cather describes for us. Time is measured by the seasons that appear in distinct colors; the sunflower-border roads to the pale-yellow cornfields of summer or the shiny green of frozen asparagus, the frail green of the half-frozen insect, and the rosy haystacks of autumn. In a sense, Cather's work is a metaphor for the American pioneer experience and the prairie, the land itself, is a force as important to the novel as its characters

Structure

My Antonia is not a tightly plotted novel. Instead, It is told in a loose but focused episodic fashion. Like a painting with a small, almost incidental window that reveals an open landscape or a distant city, this collection of memories is interrupted at rare moments with stories from another time, from another life. The wretched past of Peter and Pavel and the humble and miraculous past of Blind d' Arnault are two such windows that open up this painting of the American Great Plains during the period of immigration. For those critics who believe that Antonia is the center of the novel, these interruptions

in the story are problematic-as is the long section about Jim's life in Lincoln and his affair with Lena Lingard.

Style

Cather's superb prose style is disarmingly clear and simple, relying on a straightforward narration of facts. Yet it is also subtle, using carefully selected images to create a rich portrayal of the prairie environment She worked consciously to achieve this effect through the selection of which details to include and which to leave out She also heaped up incidents to achieve a realistic portrayal of life. known as verisimilitude. Cather described this prose style as "unfurnished" in an essay entitled "The Novel Demeuble." She compared it to throwing all the furniture out of a room and leaving it as bare as the stage of a Greek theater. To accomplish this, she eliminated many adverbs, used strong verbs, and many figures of speech.

Imagery

Cather's sparse but allusive style relies on the quality and depth of her images. She consciously used the land, its colors, seasons, and changes to suggest emotions and moods. Summer stands for life (Antonia can't imagine who would want to die during the summer) and winter for death (Mr. Shimerda commits suicide during the winter). Animals are used as symbols of the struggle for survival experienced by the Shimerdas during their first winter. The essential grotesque image of the cost of this struggle is that of Mr. Shimerda's corpse frozen in his blood, his coat and neck cloth and boots removed and carefully laid by for the survivors. At the end of the novel, Cather uses animalistic images as symbols of fertility and abundance. Antonia's children come up out of the well-stocked larder like "a veritable explosion of life out of the dark cave into the sunlight" One image has become almost emblematic of the novel. A plough, magnified through the distance, "heroic in size, a picture writing on the sun," freezes the moment when Jim picnics for the last time with his childhood friends. The vision disappears, the sun sets, and "that forgotten plough had sunk back to its own littleness somewhere on the prairie."

Realism

Jim Burden gives voice to a romanticism, or overly sentimental or positive outlook, that Cather was not quite distant from. The homesteading German, Danish, Bohemian, and Scandinavian settlers were the embodiment of a cultural tradition she cherished. However, the novel is saved from sentimentality by the evocative depiction of the harsh realities of pioneer and immigrant life and the complexity of the characters, who are rarely, if ever, only sympathetic or only despicable.

Historical Context

Immigration

Up until 1825, less than 10,000 new immigrants came to the United States each year. By the late 1840s, revolutions in Europe and the devastating potato famine in Ireland sent people to this country by the hundreds of thousands. Immigration increased steadily during the 1850s, and by 1860, one-eighth of America's 32 million people were foreign born. While many of these immigrants settled around the mill towns of the east as well as in the larger urban centers, the promotional activities of the railroads brought many immigrants straight past them to the prairies. The railroad companies even sent scouts abroad to encourage people to come and settle the plains and prairies. It has been claimed that the transcontinental railroad could not have been built without immigrant labor. The railroad was not just crucial to economic success of the town and countryside: it was a powerful monopoly charging what it wished to ship grain to the market. Another flood of immigrants came in the 1860s and 1870s, just after the Homestead Act of 1862. This legislation granted, for a small fee, 160 acres of Western public land to citizens or prospective citizens who would stay and settle it for five years. These settlers were predominantly from western and northern Europe. They became the "old immigrants" when the numbers of "new immigrants" from eastern and southern Europe swelled in the 1880s and 1890s.

In Willa Cather's Nebraska, the population quadrupled between the Civil War and 1880, and then doubled again during the 1880s. Low prices for farm products in the late l880s and early 1890s compounded by drought in the mid-1890s made success elusive for many on the Great Plains until almost the turn of the century. By the time Cather was writing *My Antonia,* immigration to the Great Plains had slowed. Urban immigration, however, continued to cause miserable situations in the cities. As a journalist in Pittsburgh and New York City and as a newspaperwoman and editor for a radical magazine, *McClure's,* Cather was exposed to the conditions in which numerous urban immigrants lived. She also saw the mounting fear that the arrival of cheap foreign labor was not only undesirable competition but a contribution to the widening and hardening gap between rich and poor. During World War I, German-Americans were definitely suspect and stories of their victimization can be found in almost any Midwestern state histories. Even the Czechs, who were eager to help free their homeland from the domination of Austria-Hungary, suffered during the war years. The country's anxiety over the role immigrants were to play in our society did not ease, even though the "tide" of immigration was stemmed briefly by World War I.

Theories of Americanization

By the time Willa Cather was writing *My Antonia,* reaction to the massive European immigration of the nineteenth century had fostered two opposing theories of Americanization. These models have come to be called the "melting pot" theory and the

"salad bowl' theory and still define the debate on difference even today, almost a century later. In the 1890s Frederick Jackson Turner popularized the image of the American West as a crucible where European immigrants would be "Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race." One can read *My Antonia* as a tribute to this view and appreciate Antonia herself as "the rich mine of life, like the founders of early races" that produces the American people from the raw material that has been gathered on its shores. At its best, this view can serve as a model of assimilation. At its worst, it argues for a nativism, or favoring of native-born citizens, which is vulnerable to a fear or hatred of foreigners. Indeed, the American Nativists of the 1910s and 1920s fiercely opposed the waves of immigration. An alternative view of Americanization was articulated by philosopher Horace M. Kallen in an article in the *Nation,* circulated three years before *My Antonia* was published. Each nationality should express its "emotional and voluntary life in its own language, in its own inevitable aesthetic and intellectual form," according to Kallen. This idea has since been termed cultural pluralism. Carl Degler coined the expression "salad bowl."

Critical Overview

Cather's fourth novel, and her third to be set in the West, *My Antonia* drew attention as the work of an already established writer. In *The Borzoi 1920,* H. L. Mencken enthusiastically called Cather extraordinary. "I know of no novel that makes the remote fold of the western farmlands more real than *My Antonia* and I know of none that makes them seem better worth knowing." The nucleus of subsequent discussions over who is the protagonist can be detected in early reviews. The *Nation* Critic declared the novel the "portrait of a woman," as did other observers; however, some reviewers thought Antonia no more important than the physical background of the story. Perhaps the best all-around contemporary estimate of *My Antonia* is Randolph Bourne's, who recognized in it the realist's command of material, knowledge of the countryside, and understanding of its people. He praised the "gold charm" of its style. In his *Dial* review, he defined Jim's vision as "romantic" and Antonia as the "imaginative center" of *his* memoir. Within this book, he claimed, Cather "has taken herself out of the rank of provincial writers" and given readers a modern, universal interpretation of the spirit of youth. The feeling that Cather had arrived with *My Antonia* was shared by Carl VanDoren, who, three years after the novel Came out, distinguished her work from that of local colorist Sarah Orne Jewett, whose *The Country of the Pointed Firs* had been a major influence on Cather. However, troubled by the novel's structural irregularities, or what he felt to be the "largely superfluous" introduction, he admonished her in a *Nahon* article "to find the precise form for the representation of a memorable character." He added that it is not enough merely to free oneself "from the bondage of 'plot.'" One critic compared Cather to English novelist Thomas Hardy in making setting epic in scope and integral to story.

My Antonia remained a benchmark for Cather but earned her very little money. The World War I novel that followed, however, *One of Ours* (1922) was not only a best-seller, but also earned Cather the Pulitzer Prize. Ironically, the critics were not impressed, and some were outright derisive. During the 1920s and 1930s, Cather was often criticized for retreating from the present to the romanticized past. In a 1933 *English Journal* article, Marxist critic Granville Hicks continued to praise *My Antonia* as a "faithful re-creation" of the "bleakness and cruelty" of prairie monotony and small-town narrowness, but condemned Cather for turning to a remote world in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927). Alfred Kazin gave faint praise in his 1942 study *On Native Ground,* saying Cather could "secede with dignity" from modern America by using nostalgia to create values.

The explosion of criticism that followed Cather's death in 1947 was more focused on textual problems in *My Antonia* and, again, the issue has been raised as to who is the real protagonist. Maxwell Geismar detected a split between the "ostensible heroine, Antonia" and Lena Lingard, "who almost runs away with the show" For those who saw Antonia as the main character, the structure of the book became a problem. British critic David Daiches, in his 1951 book-length study of Cather, is typical in this regard. He faults the author for occasionally losing sight of her theme, which he conceives to be the "development and self-discovery of the heroine." E. K. Brown notes in his 1953 critical bl0graphy that Cather's strategy of having a male narrator fascinated with Antonia but

remaining detached results in an emptiness at the novel's center. Richard Giannone's 1968 study *Music in Willa Cather's Fiction* suggests a different center. Because Antonia's *joie de vivre* cannot be conveyed in words, it is "more a rhythm than a reason" and is expressed through music. Giannone puts the d' Arnault episode at the "pulsating center,"_ prepared for by musical references in the first book and then in the scenes at the Harlings', and followed by the "infamous" dances and the playing of Mr. Shimerda's violin at the end John Randall claimed in his 1960 book *The Landscape and the Looking Glass* that Cather balances two protagonists; he sees the novel as a system of contrasts: head (Jim) and heart (Antonia), past (Jim) and future (Antonia), contemplative life (Jim) and active life (Antonia), town life (Jim) and country Me (Antonia); also, there are contrasts between life and death, warmth and cold, and order and chaos. Randall also notes Jim's significant crisis in moving from his original family in Virginia to his second one. Similarly psychological in approach, Terence Martin views the novel in his *PMLA* article in terms of Jim's conflicting impulses toward Lena and Antonia, between forgetfulness and remembering. He sees Jim as defining both theme and structure, and the novel as presenting his story, not Antonia's. It is a drama of memory, of "how he has come to see Antonia as the epitome of all he has valued" The tendency among recent critics of *My Antonia* is to dislodge it from its niche as a work of country-life optimism by exploring undercurrents of death, violence, and sex. In a 1967 *Western American Literature* article, Charles linked Jim to Mr. Shimerda as a Thanatos (Death) character, arguing that they provide a dark frame for the vibrant story of Antonia's Eros (Love) nature. However, Susan J. Rosowski, in her 1986 book-length study of Cather, sees *My Antonia* as defying analysis, as "a continuously changing work" in the Wordsworthian tradition, a successful balancing of the world of ideas and the world of experience through imaginative fusion. In this interpretation Jim becomes a reacting mind and Antonia is the object.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

In the following essay, Dykema-Vander Ark, a doctoral candidate at Michigan State University, looks at how the stones of Jim Burden and Antonia intertwine throughout Cather's novel to address themes of childhood friendship permanence and the quest to find meaning in life.

"I first heard of Antonia on what seemed to me an interminable journey across the great midland plain of North America" So begins Jim Burden's story of "his" Antonia, and it is no accident that Jim's recollections are rooted in a journey. Willa Cather's *My Antonia* was inspired by her own travels back to her childhood home of Red Cloud, Nebraska, and the novel is full of change, transition, and travel. Many of its characters are immigrants, classified by their very movement, and the divergent Journeys through life of Jim and Antonia are its central focus. Jim's narration of his story is, itself, a Journey of sorts, a Journey *back* through his life to recapture his relationship with Antonia and all that she represents to him And, finally, the reader of *My Antonia* In a sense travels along with Jim as he returns to the country of his childhood, seeking something permanent and enduring beneath the unsettled surface of his life.

The Introduction of *My Antonia,* narrated by an unnamed woman, provides some important clues to the motives and the manner of Jim Burden's story. This narrator, a childhood friend of both Jim and Antonia, in some sense verifies Jim's impassioned view of Antonia: "More than any other person we remembered," the narrator remarks, "this girl seemed to mean to us the country, the conditions, the whole adventure of our childhood. To speak her name was to call up pictures of people and places, to set a quiet drama going in one's brain." The narrator's comment also suggests the motives that inspire Jim to write his "manuscript" about "My Antonia." By translating into writing the "pictures" and the "quiet drama" that Antonia's name recalls, Jim hopes to revisit the "whole adventure" of his early life and recapture its emotional significance. The narrator of the Introduction also gives the reader fair warning that the subject of Jim's story is out of the ordinary, unknown to most people, even, perhaps, unknowable: "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 freemasonry, we said." Paradoxically, this comment suggests that Jim's story will not succeed in explaining "the country" and "the conditions" of his childhood to anyone but his friend and a select group of readers, those with first hand knowledge of small-town prairie life. But Cather's introduction also gives away, in a sense, the secret password needed to understand the story that follows, the "name" that, once spoken, might recall the past and set it moving with life: Antonia.

On one level, Cather uses Antonia's simple story to bring to life the "country" and the "conditions" encountered and endured by many of the immigrants who settled the American frontier in the late nineteenth century. By telling this one "Pioneer Woman's Story," Cather portrays the immense hardships faced by figures like Antonia Shimerda and her family, not only the hardships of poverty, landscape, and climate, but also the social barriers erected against immigrants of particular ethnic and religious backgrounds. Cather also uses Antonia's story to celebrate the virtues of the immigrant

pioneers, virtues unnoted or ignored by many of her contemporaries who, like the people of Black Hawk, viewed all "foreigners" as "ignorant people who couldn't speak English." As a poor immigrant from Bohemia, Antonia first appears an unlikely American heroine, but Cather celebrates Antonia for her strength of character, her resilience, and her tenacity in the face of social ostracism. She appears at the end of *My Antonia* as a figure who has triumphed over the hardships of her life through stalwart struggle, producing a fruitful farm from the difficult land, upholding a large and joyful family, and ensuing an easier future for her children.

Antonia also provides the key to Jim Burden's story, in part because it is Jim who tells her story and reflects on its significance. In writing down all that he remembers of Antonia, Jim discovers the extent to which his own identity is rooted in his relationship to her. As a ten-year-old orphan at the start of his story, Jim remembers seeing the Shimerdas "huddled together on the platform" of the train station, and the sound of their "foreign tongue" is as new and strange to him as the land that surrounds him. In the years that follow his first encounter with the Shimerdas, Jim's relationship with Antonia provides him with several roles to play, acting as a language tutor, a companion, a helpmate, a suitor, and, in his "mock adventure" with the rattlesnake, a savior of sorts. As a young man, Jim distinguishes himself from what he sees as the narrow-mindedness of his immediate community by identifying with Antonia and the other "hired girls" who were "considered a menace to the social order." He expresses his "contempt" for the veneer of "respect for respectability" that defines the townsfolk. In Antonia's refusal to deny her desires, he sees an antidote to the town's "evasions and negations," its repression of "every individual taste, every natural appetite." Although Jim does not face the same restrictions as Antonia and the other "country girls,"' he Identifies with their experience of town life and, in a sense, this identification inspires his moving away from Black Hawk.

Jim also finds a key to his own life in Antonia's ability to hold onto her past-both its joys and its sorrows-through memory and through storytelling. When Jim returns from college and meets Antonia working in the fields, they "instinctively" walk to Mr. Shimerda's graveside as "the fittest place to talk to each other,"' a place symbolizing the connection they shared as children. But as they talk there, Antonia does not dwell on the painful loss of her father as a young girl; instead, she tells Jim that her father "never goes out of my life.... The older I grow, the better I know him and the more I understand him" Antonia does not try to escape or ignore her past but embraces it, carrying it with her in the present. Jim sees in Antonia's example a way to ground his life in something strong and permanent in spite of the continual movement that seems to define him. In the same conversation, Antonia also looks to the future, telling Jim how eager she is to pass on her memories of childhood to her daughter: "I can't wait till my little girl's old enough to tell her about all the things we used to do." When Jim returns to visit Antonia twenty years later, he finds her doing just that: Antonia's box of photographs and her stones about each picture draw all of her children to her side, bonding the family together in "a kind of physical harmony." Jim sees that Antonia uses her stories of the past not only to entertain but also to educate her children, to root their lives in the "people and places" of her childhood just as they are rooted in the language and customs of the "old country" despite being products of the new. In his own narration, Jim

follows the example of Antonia's storytelling, learning from her how to recapture the emotional significance of his childhood experiences and to create stories that keep the past alive in the present.

As many critics have noted, however, the stones that Jim tells in *My Antonia* do not always provide a complete or entirely reliable portrait of Antonia's life or of his own The narrator of the Introduction, for example, calls attention to Jim's "naturally romantic and ardent disposition," and Frances Harling suggests to Jim that his "romantic" temperament influences his view of the country girls: "You always put a kind of glamour over them." Jim himself notes that the "places and people" of his past stand out "strengthened and simplified" in IDS memory Although Jim identifies himself with Antonia throughout his story, he also frequently reveals the limitations of his understanding of her life. Early in their friendship, for example, Jim repeatedly finds himself confused and frustrated by the particular customs and religions rituals of the Bohemians. Even the simple, well-intended gift of dried mushrooms from the "old country" fails to connect the two families: In spite of Antonia's testimony to their usefulness and flavor, Jim's grandmother cannot identify the strange chips and throws the gift into the fire. A similar inability to understand fully all that the Shimerdas "had brought so far and treasured so jealously" continues throughout Jim's story. Even after Jim travels around the world and visits Bohemia, the "old country" of Antonia' s youth, he remains isolated from her and her family life by their language, the same "foreign tongue" that he heard for the first time as a ten-year-old boy at the train station in Black Hawk.

But this sense of distance between Jim and Antonia, even at the end of *My Antonia,* only adds poignancy to Jim's story and interest to Cather's novel. Perhaps the deep and lasting appeal of Cather's novel reflects the sense of mystery that she weaves into its many stories, the unanswered questions that Jim's narration evokes. How, for example, might the narrator of the Introduction, who only "watched her come and go," tell Antonia's story? How might Mr. Shimerda and the Widow Steavens, each of whom also calls her "My Antonia," tell her story? And, perhaps most intriguing of all, how does Antonia tell and retell her gathered children about "the country, the conditions, the whole adventure" of her life in Bohemia and America? While these questions remain, at the close of Jim's story, part of the "incommunicable past,"_ the broader themes of Cather's novel-the child's sense of undistilled happiness, the dream of being "dissolved into something complete and great,"' the mystery of genuine friendship, the quest for permanence and meaning in one's life-become real in the present for each new reader of *My Antonia.*

Source: Anthony M Dykema-Vander Ark, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 1997.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Miller explains how Cather's book is about the failure to find happiness by pursuing materialistic dreams.

[My Antonia] does not portray, in any meaningful sense, the fulfillment of the American dream. By and large, the dreams of the pioneers lie shattered, their lives broken by the hardness of wilderness life. Even those who achieve, after long struggle, some kind of secure life are diminished in the genuine stuff of life. For example, in one of his accounts that reach into the future beyond the present action, Jim Burden tells us of the eventual fate of the vivacious Tiny Soderball, one of the few to achieve "solid worldly success." She had a series of exciting adventures in Alaska, ending up with a large fortune. But later, when Jim encountered her in Salt Lake City, she was a "thin, hard-faced woman... She was satisfied with her success, but not elated. She was like someone in whom the faculty of becoming interested is worn out."

One of the major material successes of the book is Jim Burden, and in many ways the novel traces his rise in position and wealth. As most of the characters of the book travel west, his is a journey east, and, in the process, the acquisition of education, wealth, social position. In short, Jim has all the appearances of one who has lived the American dream and achieved fulfillment. But the material fulfillment has not brought the happiness promised. The entire novel is suffused with his melancholy at the loss of something precious something that existed back in the hard times, now lost amidst comfort and wealth. The whole promise of the dream has somehow slipped through his fingers right at the moment it appeared within his grasp. Why? The question brings us around to a central problem in the novel: Why has Jim, so appreciative of the vitality and freedom represented by the hired girls, ended up in a marriage so empty of meaning?

Perhaps Jim's melancholy itself tells us the reason. The book in a way represents his confession, a confession of unaware betrayal of the dream. In looking back from his vantage point in time, Jim can come to the full realization of what the hired girls (especially such as Antonia Shimerda and Lena Lingard) represented and what they have come to symbolize: simply all that is best, all that survives of worth, of the faded dream. Some critics have seen in Jim's obtuseness in his male-female relationship with Antonia and Lena a defect in the book's construction. On the contrary, tills theme is very much a part of the book's intention. Jim looking back from the wisdom of his later years and the unhappiness of his meaningless marriage can come to a much sharper awareness of precisely what he missed in his ambitious movement eastward and upward.

In Book II, "The Hired Girls,"' we are in a way witness to the dream turning sour: "The daughters of Black Hawk merchants had a confident, unenquiring belief that they were 'refined,' and that the country girls, who 'worked out,' were not." "The country girls were considered a menace to the social order. Their beauty shone out too boldly against a conventional background. But anxious mothers need have felt no alarm. They mistook

the mettle of their sons. The respect for respectability was stronger than any desire in Black Hawk youth."

Jim Burden remembered his roaming the streets of Black Hawk at night, looking at the "sleeping houses": "for all their frailness, how much jealousy and envy and unhappiness some of them managed to contain! The life that went on in them seemed to me made up of evasions and negations; shills to save cooking, to save washing and cleaning, devices to propitiate the tongue of gossip. This guarded mode of existence was like living under a tyranny. People's speech, their voices, their very glances, became furtive and repressed. Every individual taste, every natural appetite, was bridled by caution."

"Respect for respectability" is, perhaps, the cancer battening at the heart of the dream (a theme that William Faulkner was to emphasize later in his Snopes trilogy), and the reader may wonder to what extent Jim Burden himself had been infected, especially in view of the brittle wife he had acquired at some stage in his rise to the top. Moreover, Jim was strongly attracted to the vitality of the hired girls, consciously and unconsciously, as revealed in a recurring dream he had: "One dream I dreamed a great many times, and it was always the same. I was in a harvest-field full of shocks, and I was lying against one of them. Lena Lingard came across the stubble barefoot, in a short skirt, with a curved reaping-hook in her hand, and she was flushed like the dawn, with a kind of luminous rosiness all about her. She sat down beside me, turned to me with a soft sigh and said, 'Now they are all gone, and I can kiss you as much as I like.'" After this remarkable sexual revelation, Jim adds: "I used to wish I could have this flattering dream about Antonia, but I never did." Sister-like Antonia cannot be transfigured, even in dream, to sexual figure. Her role in the book, and in Jim's psyche, is destined to be more idealized, more mythic.

But Lena Lingard is the subject of an entire book of *My Antonia.* And that book works out metaphorically the meaning of the novel's epigraph from Virgil as well as the specific personal relation of Jim and Lena, this latter through symbolic use of a play they both attend, Dumas's *Camille* The epigraph for *My Antonia* is drawn from Virgil's *Georgics,* and reads: *"Optima dies... prima fugit."* This phrase comes into the novel in Book III, after Jim has entered the University of Nebraska and begun his study of Latin, translating the phrase "the best days are the first to flee." As Lena Lingard, now with a dressmaking shop in Lincoln, brings to mind for Jim all the vitality of the hired girls of Black Hawk, he makes the connection between them and the haunting phrase from Virgil: "It came over me, as it had never done before, the relation between girls like those and the poetry of Virgil If there were no girls like them in the world, there would be no poetry. I understand that clearly, for the first time. This revelation seemed to me inestimably precious. I clung to it as if it might suddenly vanish"

But if Lena (along with Antonia and the others) is equated with poetry, she is also a breathing physical reality to Jim and Book III brings Jim as close physically to one of the hired girls as the novel permits. A large part of the Book is taken up with a description of Jim's and Lena's attendance at a performance of *Camille,* the sentimental but highly effective drama by Dumasfils. As Jim remarks. "A couple of jack-rabbits, run in off the prairie, could not have been more innocent of what awaited them than were Lena and I."

Although some critics see the long account of theatre-going as a kind of inserted story or intrusion, in fact it provides a kind of sophisticated mirror image in literature for the thematic dilemma posed in the novel itself-and particularly the dilemma Jim faces in his attraction to Lena. Only a few pages before this episode, he has come to the insight equating the hired girls, in all their vitality and freedom, with poetry. Now he is confronted with the physical presence of one for whom he feels a strong attraction.

The hired girls are not, of course, Camilles, but they have some of the same kind of magic, poetry, freedom, love of life that attracted Armand to Camille-and that attract Jim to Lena. As Jim and Lena find themselves drawn closer and closer together in Lincoln, their conversation turns more and more to marriage-but only obliquely do they hint of anything deeper than friendship between themselves. Lena, pressed by Jim about her future, says she will never marry, that she prefers to be "lonesome," that the experience of marriage as she has witnessed it is even repellent Jim answers,"' But it's not all like that"' Lena replies: "'Near enough. It's all being under somebody's thumb. What's on your mind, Jim? Are you afraid I'll want you to marry me some day?"' Jim's immediate remark after this, to the reader, is: "Then I told her I was going away." The moment has passed, the future for Jim has been, in a sense, determined. Lena will go on her successful, "lonesome" way; Jim will go on to his considerable achievement and position-and his disastrous marriage.

What happened to the dream-to Jim's dream of Lena, to the larger dream of personal fulfillment? Was his failure in not seeing some connection between the dreams? Was Jim's destiny in some obscure sense a self-betrayal? And is this America's destiny, a self-betrayal of the possibilities of the dream? ...

This road is not, of course, simply Jim's and Antonia's road. It is America's road, leading not into the future, but into the past, fast fading from the landscape, fast fading from memory. It is Jim's and Antonia's--and perhaps America's" road of Destiny":

This was the road over which Antonia and I came on that night when we got off the train at Black Hawk and were bedded down In the straw, wondering children, being taken we knew not whither. I had only to close my eyes to hear the rumbling of the wagons in the dark, and to be again overcome by that obliterating strangeness. The feelings of that night were so near that I could reach out and touch them with my hand. I had the sense of coming home to myself, and of having found out what a little circle man's experience is. For Antonia and for me, this had been the road of Destiny, had taken us to those early accidents of fortune which predetermined for us all that we can ever be. Now I understood that the same road was to bring us together again. Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past.

As Americans who have dreamed the dream, we might say with Jim: "Whatever we have missed, we possess together the precious, the incommunicable past." In some dark sense, Jim's experience is the American experience, his melancholy sense of loss also his country's, his longing for something missed in the past a national longing,

The lost promise, the misplaced vision, is America's loss--our loss--and it haunts us all, still.

Source: James E Miller, Jr, " *My Antonia* and the American Dream," in *Prairie Schooner,* Vol XLVIII, No 2,Summer, 1974, pp. 112-23.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Scholes compares the characters of Jim Burden and Antonia Shimerda.

The two central figures in *My Antonia* are, in different senses, innocents. Jim Burden, bereft of both his parents within a year, is removed from the warm and comfortable Virginia of his early days and thrust into the strange and frightening world of Nebraska. As he bumps along on the wagon ride to his new home, he feels that he has left even the spirits of his dead parents behind him:

The wagon jolted on, carrying me I know not whither. I don't think I was homesick. If we never arrived anywhere, it did not matter. Between that earth and that sky I felt erased, blotted out I did not say my prayers that night, here, I felt, what would be would be.

Antonia Shimerda, though also a young, innocent creature in a raw country, is not bereft of the past as Jim Burden is. Antonia's Bohemian ancestry is a part of her and exerts a decided influence on her present and future. We are reminded of this past constantly: by the Bohemian customs and culinary practices of the Shimerdas; by the observations of Otto Fuchs on the relationship of Austrians and Bohemians in the old country; and especially by the Catholic religion of the Bohemians, which is their strongest link with the past, and which serves to bind them together and to separate them from the Protestant society of their adopted land. But, most important, Antonia herself cherishes her connection with the past. When Jim asks if she remembers the little town of her birth, she replies,

"Jim... If I was put down there in the middle of the night, I could find my way all over that little town; and along the river where my grandmother lived My feet remember all the little paths through the woods, and where the big roots stick out to trip you. I ain't never forgot my own country "

But despite the importance of the past for An tonia, she and the other hired girls are figures of heroic and vital innocence, associated with nature and the soil. Like Lena Lingard, they all "waked fresh with the world every day." They are unused to the ways of society, and Antonia, especially, is too trusting. Lena tells Jim that Antonia "won't hear a word against [Larry Donovan]. She's so sort of innocent." The struggle of the "hired girls" with society is one of the important themes of the novel. Jim Burden remarks that

the country girls were considered a menace to the social order. Their beauty shone out too boldly against a conventional background. But anxious mothers need have felt no alarm. They mistook the mettle of their sons. The respect for respectability was stronger than any desire in Black Hawk youth.

This struggle of the country girls with the city is a very perplexing one, in which apparent victory and apparent defeat are both apt to prove evanescent in time. Lena Lingard and Tiny Soderball become successful, triumphing even in the metropolis of San Francisco,

while Antonia becomes the foolish victim of her love for a conniving railroad conductor. But Lena and Tiny succeed only in becoming more like the society from which they had been ostracized, while Antonia, and the other country girls who stay on the land, ultimately change the structure of society itself. Tim Burden remarks,

I always knew I should live long enough to see my country girls come into their own, and I have Today the best that a harassed Black Hawk merchant can hope for is to sell provisions and farm machinery and automobiles to the rich farms where that first crop of stalwart Bohemian and Scandinavian girls are now the mistresses.

Jim Burden, like Lena and Tiny, has made his success in the city and on the city's terms. From the narrator of the introductory chapter we learn that Jim's personal life, his marriage, has not been a success though his legal work flourishes. Jim's failure to find happiness or satisfaction in his career and in the city, constitutes for him the "fall" into self-knowledge which is characteristic of the Adamic hero It is Jim's recognition of his own fall that makes him superior to Lena and Tiny, and enables him to live vicariously through Antonia and her children.

Antonia's seduction is a more clear-cut "fall" than Jim's unhappiness, and her subsequent self-knowledge is more strikingly evidenced. When Jim meets Antonia after she has had her illegitimate child, he notices "a new kind of strength in the gravity of her face." At this meaning she asks Jim whether he has learned to like big cines, adding that she would die of lonesomeness in such a place. "I like to be where I know every stack and tree, and where all the ground is friendly," she says; and after they part Jim feels "the old pull of the earth, the solerint magic that comes out of those fields at night-fall," and he wishes he could be a little boy again, and that his way would end there.

When Jim revisits Antonia and her thriving family, she has in some ways relapsed toward the past. "'I've forgot my English so.'" She says, "'I don't often talk It any more. I tell the children I used to speak it real well.' She said they all spoke Bohemian at home. The little ones could not speak English at all-didn't learn It until they went to school." But her children, her involvement in life, makes her concerned for the future. She has lived "much and hard," reflects Jim as they meet, but "she was there, in the full vigor of her personality, battered but not diminished, looking at me, speaking to me in the husky, breathy voice I remembered so well." Jim, however, is not recognized by Antonia at first, even though he has "kept so young."

He is less battered, perhaps, but he is more diminished.

So it is that Antonia, who is always conscious of the past, is nevertheless free of it, and capable of concern for the future. And her past is not merely that of a generation or so. Tim observes, "She lent herself to immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct as universal and true. . . It was no wonder that her sons stood tall and straight. She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races." Whereas Jim, who has no such connection with the past, who came to Nebraska without a family and rode on a wagon into a new life which he felt was beyond even the attention of God, is still bound by the recent past, by what has happened to him in his own youth, and he lives in both

the present and the future only vicariously through the plans and lives of others. He reflects, "In the course of twenty crowded years one parts with many illusions. I did not wish to lose the early ones. Some memories are realities, and are better than anything that can happen to one again." Jim is haunted by the past, by the sense that, in the phrase of Virgil which is the novel's epigraph, *Optima dies ... prima fugit* When he contemplates in the closing lines of his narrative the road on which he had entered his new life as a boy, he reconsiders his whole existence:

I had the sense of coming home to myself, and of having found out what a little circle man's experience is. For Autonia and for me, this had been the road of Destiny, had taken us to those early accidents of fortune winch predetermined for us all that we can ever be. Now I understood that the same road was to bring us together again. Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past.

Antonia's life is not tragic. She is neither defeated nor destroyed by life, not even diminished. Yet the distinguishing characteristic of this novel is its elegiac tone; the eternal note of sadness pervades especially the closing passages of the book. The direct cause of this element of sadness is the nostalgia of Jim Burden, through which the story of Antonia filters down to the reader. But behind Jim Burden's nostalgia, and merged with it, is the nostalgia of Willa Cather herself.

There is a suggestion in this novel and in the earlier *0 Pioneers!* that the younger brothers and the sisters of this splendid generation of pioneer women will not be their equals. Emil Bergson-the youth in *0 Pioneers!* for whom his older sister Alexandra labors and plans-attends the university, escapes from the plough, only to rum several lives through his adulterous love. And in *My Antonia* there is the suggestion that the coming generations will be less heroic and more ordinary than the present breed. Jim Burden at one point muses on this problem, thinking of the hired girls in Black Hawk:

Those girls had grown up in the first bitter-hard tones, and had got little schooling themselves. But the younger brothers and sisters, for whom they made such sacrifices and who have had "advantages," never seem to me, when I meet them now, half as interesting or as well educated The older girls, who helped to break up the Wild sod, learned so much from life, from poverty, from their mothers and grandmothers; they had all, like Antonia, been early awakened and made observant by coming at a tender age from an old country to anew.

The circumstances which formed Antonia will not be repeated; the future will be in the hands of a diminished race. It is the feeling which haunts Willa Cather's novel. Antonia looks to the future of her children, but Jim Burden knows that the future will be at best a poor imitation of the past. Antonia's life is a triumph of innocence and vitality over hardship and evil. But Willa Cather does not celebrate this triumph; rather, she intones an elegy over the dying myth of the heroic Innocent, over the days that are no more.

Source: Robert E. Scholes, "Hope and Memory in *My Antonia," in Shenandoah,* Vol. XIV, No I, Autumn,1962, pp 24-29.

Adaptations

My Antonia was adapted for television in 1994 by Victoria Riskin and David W. Finteis, Fast Track Films, Inc., Wilshire Productions, and is distributed by Paramount Home Video. It stars Nell Patrick Harris, as Jim Burden, Jason Robards Jr. and Eva Marie Saint as Jim's grandparents, and Elina Lowensohn as Antonia. The film was directed by Joseph Sargent.

Charles Jones adapted *My Antonia* for the stage. The work was published by Samuel French in 1994.

Sound recordings of *My Antonia* are available from Bookcassette Sales, Brilliance Corp., and Blackstone Audio Books.

Topics for Further Study

Explore the religious, social, and national background of the various waves of European immigration to the Great Plains and how these factors affected their assimilation into "American" society.

Track the correlation between changing economic conditions and the changing American attitude toward immigration.

Consider how much of Mrs. Shimerda's greed and false pride is a product of her own psychological nature or of the circumstances we find her in.

Consider reasons why Willa Cather chose a male narrator and why women dominate the novel.

Compare Willa Cather's writing style to that of Herman Melville, that of Ernest Hemingway, or that of Virginia Woolf.

Create two differing interpretations of *My Antonia,* one depending on Jim Burden as its center and one with Antonia Shimerda at its center.

Compare and Contrast

1880s: The "new 1mmigrants" who came from eastern and southern Europe in the 1880s are considered a potential threat to the "American" character. For the first time, in 1882, Congress acts to restrict immigration on a selective bas1s, although standards are not very stringent. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 puts an end to the 1mportation of cheap Chinese labor which had caused some ugly racial riots in the West

Post World War I: Congress passes the Immigration Act of 1924; it institutes a quota system based on the U.S. population in 1920 and was an overt attempt to keep the country's ethnic "composition" what it had been-that 1S, predominantly Northern European.

Today: The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 gave legal status to millions of Illegal aliens living in the U.S. Since January 1982 and established penalties for anyone found hiring Illegal aliens. Immigration preferences are extended due to family relationships and needed skills, not country of origin. In the 1990s, states like California attempt to pass legislation restricting government serv1ces to legal 1mmigrants.

1880s: After the Civil War, the Fifteenth Amendment extended the right to vote to include black males. Women of all races remained unable to vote. An active woman's movement in the 1880s consolidated in 1890 into the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

Post World War I: In August, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was added to the Constitution and stated that the "right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied by the United States or any State on account of sex.".

Today: In 1963, Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* jumpstarted a stalled women's rights movement. Issues such as the right for equal pay, the need for child-care services, and the problem of gender stereotyping became the Critical concerns on the agenda of the current feminist movement.

1880s: The Monroe Doctrine, articulated in 1823 by U.S. Pres1dent James Monroe, held sway throughout the century. It represented a mood of isolation from the political turbulence of Europe as well as an increased awareness of the opportunities for expansion on the American continent.

What Do I Read Next?

In *The American* (1877), Henry James presents a clash between an aristocratic old French family and a wealthy, self-made American. This novel is the first of his studies of the contrast between the simple, innocent American and the sophisticated, corrupt European.

In Franz Kafka's unfinished novel *Amerika* (1927, translated 1938), he deals with the adventures and ordeals of a young European in an unreal, expressionistically depicted America.

Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of Pointed Firs* (1896) is a book of tales and sketches thinly bound together by a faint thread of plot which portrays a Maine seaport town from the point of view of a summer resident.

Giants in the Earth: A Saga of the Prairie (192425 in Norwegian; 1927 in English) is a stark and realistic work by the Norwegian-American novelist Ole E. Rolvaag describing the hardships, both mental and physical, of a small group of Norwegian farmers who set out from Minnesota with their families in 1873 to settle in the then unopened Dakota Territory. It is the fIrst in a trilogy that also contains *Peder Victorious* and *Their Father's God.*

Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* (1920) is both a satire and an affectionate portrait of Gopher Prairie, a typical American town, which was undoubtedly suggested by Sauk Centre, Minnesota, where Lewis was born.

In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Hester Prynne evolves through the shame of her punishment, to wear an embroidered scarlet letter A on her breast as a symbol of her adultery.

O *Pioneers!* (1913) is Willa Cather's second novel and the first to be set in Nebraska. Alexandra Bergson, deeply devoted to the land, takes over the care of her family on the death of her father and establishes a prosperous farm.

Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927) is one of Cather's Southwest novels and describes the missionary efforts of the French bishop Jean Latour and his vicar to establish a diocese in the territory of New Mexico.

The angriest piece of fiction that Willa Cather ever wrote is *My Mortal Enemy* (1926). Myra Henshawe feels cheated by life and dies of cancer, alone and embittered.

Further Study

Joan Acocella, "Cather and the Academy,"' in *New Yorker,* November 27,1995, pp. 56-71.

An insightful essay examining the varying responses of the "literary establishment" to Cather's fiction during this century.

Mildred R Bennett, *The World of Willa Cather,* Dodd, Mead, 1951; University of Nebraska Press, 1961.

This book is of primary value in understanding the influence of Cather's childhood on her fiction.

Edward Bloom and Lillian Bloom, *Willa Cather's Gift of Sympathy,* Southern Illinois University Press, 1962.

A book-length appraisal of Cather's place in American literature, with comparisons to Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, and James, especially valuable for his contribution in exploring Cather's literary theones and practices.

Harold Bloom editor, *Willa Cather's "My Antonia,"* Chelsea House, 1987.

A useful collection of essays on Cather's novel representing a range of critical perspectives

Brent L. Bohlke editor, *Willa Cather in Person' Interviews, Speeches, and Letters,* University of Nebraska Press, 1986 This selection of Cather's written and spoken words offers insight into her fictional writing.

Willa Cather, *The World and the Parish,* University of Nebraska Press, 1970.

A two-volume set of Cather's early articles and reviews, published in periodicals between 1893 and 1902.

Robert W. Cherney, "Willa Cather's Nebraska" in *Approaches to Teaching Cather's "My Antonia,"* edited by Susan J. Rosowski, Modern Language Association of America, New York, 1989, pp. 31-36.

An essay that focuses specifically on the socio-economic and demographic climate in Willa Cather's Nebraska at the end of the 19th century.

Judith Fryer, *Felicitous Space' The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather,* University of North Carolina Press, 1986.

Attending to the painted quality of Cather's landscape, this book focuses on the influence Millet and the Barbizon painters had on Cather.

Blanche H. Gelfant, 'The Forgotten Reaping-hook: Sex in *My Antonia," American Literature,* Vol 43, 1971, pp. 60-82.

Gelfant questions the reliability of Jim's narration and argues that "Jim Burden belongs to a remarkable gallery of characters for whom Cather consistently invalidates sex."

Philip Gerber, *Willa Cather,* Twayne, 1995.

A recently revised critical overview of Cather's life and work, including a brief character study of Antonia

Sally Allen McNall, "Immigrant Backgrounds to *My Antonia:* A Curious Social Situation in Black Hawk" in *Approaches to Teaching Cather's 'My Antonia,'* edited by Susan J. Rosowski, Modern Language Association of America, 1989, pp. 22-30.

A fact-filled essay on the social conditions that provided the background for Cather's *My Antonia* and the questions that arise from the novel.

John J. Murphy, *'My Antonia'. The Road Home,* Twayne's Masterwork Studies, Twayne Publishers, 1989.

A comprehensive book including textual analysis, critical summary, chronology, and historical context.

Paul A. Olsen, "The Epic and Great Plains Literature: Rolvaag, Cather and Neihardt," *Prairie Schooner,* Vol 55, 1981, pp. 263-85.

This article attempts to show that when a redefined epic tradition is applied to *My Antonia,* Antonia becomes the heroic creator of the new civilization and Jim the hymner singing her accomplishments.

Susan J Rosowski editor, *Approaches to Teaching Cather's 'My Antonia',* Modern Language Association, 1989. Though Intended primarily for teachers, this collection of brief essays also offers the first-time reader several productive avenues into Cather's novel.

David Stouck, *Willa Cather's Imagination,* Lincoln' University of Nebraska Press, 1975.

A book-length study using the pastoral mode as key to understanding Jim's compulsion to return to the past.

William J Stuckey, "My Antonia: A Rose for Miss Cather," *Studies* in *the Novel,* Vol 4, 1972, pp. 473-83.

In this article, Cather, is compared to Fitzgerald and is faulted for not making a clear distinction between realistic skepticism and romantic vision.

James Woodress, *Willa Cather A Literary Life,* University of Nebraska Press, 1987.

A recent biography In winch the author praises *My Antonia* for Its breadth of appeal and its depth of intellectual and emotional content.

James Woodress, "Willa Cather," In *Concise Dictionary of American Literary Biography. Realism, Nationalism and Local Color,* 1986-1917, Gale, 1988, pp. 36-51.

A comprehensive essay of both Cather's life and work by Cather's biographer with a special focus on her novels.

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H L. Mencken, "Willa Cather,"' *The Borzoi 1920,* edited by Alfred A. Knopf, 1920, pp. 28-31.

Review of *My Antonia,* in *The Nation* Vol. 107, No. 2783, Nov. 2, 1918, pp 522-23.

John H Randall, III, *The Landscape and the Looking Glass: Willa Cather's Search for Meaning,* Houghton, 1960. Susan J. Rosowski, *The Voyage Perilous. Willa Cather's Romanticism,* University of Nebraska Press, 1986.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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