



EVERYMAN

MY ÁNTONIA

WILLA CATHER

Willa Cather

MY ÁNTONIA

Introduced by

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EVERYMAN

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NOTE ON THE AUTHOR AND EDITOR

WILLA CATHER was born on 7 December 1873 to Charles Cather and Mary Virginia Boak Cather in Back Creek Valley, Virginia. The family moved nine years later to Nebraska. Her observations of friends, neighbours and immigrants in Nebraska, which was still very much a frontier state, became the primary source material for Cather's later writings. Willa was educated locally at Red Cloud School and after graduating in 1890 she entered the University of Nebraska. While at university she wrote essays, articles and short stories which helped to establish her as a journalist. After graduating from university she went on to edit several leading periodicals, including *Home Monthly*, *Pittsburgh Leader* and, finally, *McClure's Magazine*.

In 1912 she ended her journalism career so as to become a full-time writer. Cather has often been categorised as a regional writer, but this is far from the truth. Her writing, even in the 'pioneer novels' where the prose seems simple and spartan, is informed by a cosmopolitan intellect and a Jamesian sensibility. On occasions her aesthetic aims threaten the realism of her subject, but this rarely happens – indeed it is the confluence of her 'pioneer' experience and her classic education which mark Willa Cather as an extraordinary writer, giving her an edge over such peers as Edith Wharton, or even Kate Chopin.

Willa Cather led an unusual life for a woman of her day, travelling to the remoter places of America: the Southwest (Anasazi), Colorado and Taos, New Mexico, where she met D. H. Lawrence. She remained unmarried and formed a number of close attachments with female friends, including Annie Sadliek, the model for Antonia. On 24 April 1947 Willa died from a brain haemorrhage in New York.

Her publications include a collection of poems, *April Twilights* (1903; revised 1933) which was influenced by the classicist A. E. Houseman, author of *A Shropshire Lad*. She wrote

numerous short stories that are collected in *The Troll Gardens* (1905), *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (1920) and *Obscure Destinies* (1932). An early novel, *Alexander's Bridge* (1912) based in part upon Henrik Ibsen's *The Master Builder*, was imitative of Henry James and Edith Wharton. Following the advice of the Maine colourist, Sarah Orne Jewett, Cather began to write more from personal experience in the 'pioneer novels': *O Pioneers!* (1913), *The Song of the Lark* (1915), *My Ántonia* (1918) and *One of Ours* (1922). The next three novels are more sophisticated and deal with America's aristocratic class: *A Lost Lady* (1923), *The Professor's House* (1925), *My Mortal Enemy* (1926). Her interest in Catholicism is reflected in the two novels *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) and *Shadows on the Rock* (1931) and in her two final novels, *Lucy Gayheart* (1935) and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940). She also wrote a number of essays collected in *Not Under Forty* (1936) and, posthumously, in *Willa Cather on Writing* (1949).

PENELOPE LIVELY was born in Egypt and spent her childhood there before coming to England at the age of twelve. She read Modern History at St Anne's College, Oxford. She is a novelist, short-story writer and children's writer and has won a number of literary awards, including the Booker Prize for *Moon Tiger* (1987). Her books are translated into many languages.

CHRONOLOGY OF WILLA CATHER'S LIFE

<i>Year</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Life</i>
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1873		Wilella ('Willie') Cather is born on 7 December in Back Creek Valley, Virginia to Charles Cather and Mary Virginia Boak
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1874	1	Cathers move to the grandparents' sheep farm in Willow Shade
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1877	4	Birth of Roscoe Cather
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CHRONOLOGY OF HER TIMES

Year	Artistic Context	Historical Events
1873	Twain, <i>The Gilded Age</i> Anthony Trollope, <i>The Eustace Diamonds</i> Verne, <i>Around the World in Eighty Days</i>	Republic proclaimed in Spain Thiers Falls
1874	Hardy, <i>Far from the Madding Crowd</i> Alarcón, <i>The Three-Cornered Hat</i>	End of Ashanti War Disraeli Prime Minister (~1880) First Impressionist Exhibition in Paris
1875	Trollope, <i>The Way We Live Now</i> Dostoevsky, <i>A Raw Youth</i> Tolstoy, <i>Anna Karenina</i> (1875-7)	Temperance Movement in US Risings in Bosnia and Hercegovina against Turkish Rule First swim across the English Channel
1876	Wagner, <i>The Ring of the Nibelungen</i> (performed) George Eliot, <i>Daniel Deronda</i>	Civil Rights Acts in US Serbia and Montenegro declare war against Turkey Colorado admitted to US
1877	James, <i>The American</i> Anna Sewell, <i>Black Beauty</i> Flaubert, <i>A Simple Heart</i> Turgenyev, <i>Virgin Soil</i>	Telephone patented by Bell Russia declares war on Turkey First Kaffir War. Satsuma revolt in Japan
1878	Hardy, <i>The Return of the Native</i>	Nez Percé Indian War in US Edison invents the phonograph British-Afghanistan War. Humbert crowned King of Italy. Treaty of Berlin. Anti-Socialist law in Germany
1879	Browning, <i>Dramatic Idylls</i> Meredith, <i>The Egoist</i> Dostoevsky, <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> Ibsen, <i>The Dolls House</i>	Austro-German Alliance. British-Zulu War Saccharin discovered

X CHRONOLOGY OF WILLA CATHER'S LIFE

Year Age Life

1880 7 Birth of Douglass Cather

1881 8 Birth of Jessica Cather

1883 10 The sheep farm burns down. The family moves again, this time to the Catherton precinct of Webster Country, Nebraska

1884 11 Charles Cather and his family move to Red Cloud, the county seat, where he opens a real-estate and loan office and rents a house at Third and Cedar streets. A storekeeper teaches Willa Greek and Latin. She develops life-long friendships with members of the Miner family and meets Annie Sadilek, the model for *Antonia Shimerda* in *My Antonia*

1885 12 Willa participates in local theatricals

1886 13 Willa cuts her hair short and talks about becoming a surgeon

Year	Artistic Context	Historical Events
1880	Hardy, <i>The Trumpet-Major</i> Disraeli, <i>Endymion</i> Zola, <i>Nana</i>	Gladstone Prime Minister Tahiti annexed by France Garfield President of US
1881	James, <i>Washington Square</i> , <i>The Portrait of a Lady</i> Sarah Orne Jewett, <i>Country By-Ways</i> Stevenson, <i>Virginus Puerisque</i> Wilde, <i>Poems</i> Ibsen, <i>Ghosts</i>	Transvaal recognized Garfield assassinated; Chester Arthur succeeds Austro-Serbian alliance
1882	Twain, <i>The Prince and the Pauper</i> Ibsen, <i>The Enemy of the People</i>	Triple Alliance between Italy, Austria and Germany US bans Chinese immigrants for ten years
1883	Stevenson, <i>Treasure Island</i> Olive Schreiner, <i>The Story of an African Farm</i> Nietzsche, <i>Thus Spake Zarathustra</i> (1883-5)	Paul Kruger President of South Africa. Tunis controlled by the French. Britain evacuates from Sudan Metropolitan Opera Association in New York
1884	Ibsen, <i>The Wild Duck</i> Huysmann, <i>Against the Grain</i>	General Gordon in Khartoum South-West Africa occupied by Germany. Berlin Conference S.S. McClure's founded
1885	Hudson, <i>The Purple Land</i> Zola, <i>Germinal</i> Maupassant, <i>Bel-Ami</i>	Mahdi take Khartoum; Gordon killed; Belgium take Congo; Britain establishes protectorates over several areas Grover Cleveland inaugurated as 22nd US President. Apache Wars
1886	James, <i>The Bostonians</i> , <i>The Princess Casamassima</i> Sarah Orne Jewett, <i>A White Heron and Other Stories</i> Stevenson, <i>Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde</i> Tolstoy, <i>The Death of Ivan Illyich</i> Rimbaud, <i>Illuminations</i>	Home Rule Bill in Ireland First Indian National Congress Haymarket Square riots in Chicago

Year Age Life

1887 14 Birth of James Cather

- 1890 17 Willa graduates in June from Red Cloud High School and delivers the commencement speech, 'Superstition versus Imagination'. In September she moves to Lincoln and enrolls in a Latin school to prepare to enter the University of Nebraska, matriculating as a regular degree candidate a year later
- 1891 18 'An Essay on Thomas Carlyle', Willa's first appearance in print, published in March in the *Nebraska State Journal*. She switches from science to humanities as her major course of study. She studies the classics. Friendships develop with Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Mary Gere and Louise Pound
- 1892 19 In May the short story 'Peter' is published in Boston Magazine, 'The Mahogany Tree'
- 1893 20 Begins writing column 'One Way of Putting It', which includes dramatic criticism, for the *Nebraska State Journal* in November. Her grandmother dies
- 1894 21 Cather is literary editor of the school annual, *Sombrero*
- 1895 22 Cather attends an opera for the first time in Chicago. Graduates from University of Nebraska in June, returns to family in Red Cloud

Year	Artistic Context	Historical Events
1887	Haggard, <i>She</i> Strindberg, <i>The Father</i> Zola, <i>The Soil</i> Chekhov, <i>Ivanov</i>	Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee Union Indo-Chinoise founded by France
1888	Hardy, <i>Wessex Tales</i> Strindberg, <i>Miss Julie</i>	Suez Canal Convention Kaiser Wilhem II succeeds his father
1889	Bergson, <i>Time and Free Will</i>	Benjamin Harrison inaugurated as 23rd US President. North Dakota, Montana, Washington become States of the US Oklahoma is opened to non-Indian settlement Austrian Crown Prince commits suicide
1890	Frazer, <i>The Golden Bough</i> (1890-1915) Gissing, <i>The Emancipated</i> Ibsen, <i>Hedda Gabler</i> Hamsun, <i>Hunger</i>	Cecil Rhodes Premier of Cape Colony First general election in Japan Idaho and Wyoming admitted to US. McKinley Tariff Act Anti-Trust Act
1891	Morris, <i>News From Nowhere</i> Hardy, <i>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</i> Wilde, <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> Tolstoy, <i>The Kreutzer Sonata</i>	Renewal of Triple Alliance between Germany, Austria and Italy. Franco-Russian Entente Young Turk movement
1892	Doyle, <i>The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes</i> Wilde, <i>Lady Windermere's Fan</i> Ibsen, <i>The Master Builder</i>	Gladstone Prime Minister of England Grover Cleveland US President Pan-Slav Conference at Cracow
1893	Wilde, <i>Salomé</i>	Independent Labour party formed by Keir Hardie Hawaii annexed by US Financial gold and silver panic in US. Chicago Exposition
1894	Kipling, <i>The Jungle Book</i> Moore, <i>Esther Waters</i> Hamsun, <i>Pan</i>	Korea and Japan at war with China; Chinese defeated at Port Arthur Dreyfus Trial in France Wilson-Gorman Tariff Act
1895	Hardy, <i>Jude the Obscure</i> Conrad, <i>Almayer's Folly</i> Wells, <i>The Time Machine</i>	Rhodesia formed Armenian massacre

<i>Year</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Life</i>
1896	23	In January Cather's short story 'On the Divide' is published in the <i>Overland Monthly</i> . Moves to Pittsburgh in June to edit the <i>Home Monthly</i> and later writes drama reviews for the <i>Pittsburgh Leader</i>
1897	24	Contributes to a book column for <i>Home Monthly</i> . In September begins job as the day telegraph editor for the <i>Leader</i> . Becomes friends with George and Helen Seibel
1898	25	Reviews plays for the New York <i>Sun</i> . Spends time with her cousin Professor James Howard Gore and his Norwegian wife, Lillian
1899	26	Introduced to Isabelle McClung, daughter of a Pittsburgh judge, sometime during the spring
1900	27	'Eric Hermannson's Soul' published in <i>Cosmopolitan</i>
1901	28	Moves into the McClung family home. Teaches English and Latin at Pittsburgh Central High School
1902	29	Poems published in <i>Harpers</i> and other magazines. She spends a summer in Europe with Isabelle McClung and meets the British poet A. E. Houseman
1903	30	March, Richard G. Badger publishes her first book, <i>April Twilights</i> , a collection of thirty-seven poems
1904	31	Works on her short stories.

Year	Artistic Context	Historical Events
1896	A. E. Houseman, <i>A Shropshire Lad</i> Chekhov, <i>The Sea Gull</i> Jarry, <i>Ubu Roi</i>	Utah becomes state of US Madagascar annexed by France Kitchener campaigns in Sudan
1897	Stoker, <i>Dracula</i> Tolstoy, <i>What is Art</i> Rostand, <i>Cyrano de Bergerac</i> Gide, <i>The Fruits of the Earth</i>	Greece and Turkey at war William McKinley becomes US President Russia occupies Port Arthur
1898	Hardy, <i>Wessex Poems</i> Wilde, <i>The Ballad of Reading Gaol</i> Svevo, <i>As a Man Grows Older</i> Zola, 'J'Accuse'	Kruger President of Transvaal US declares war on Spain over Cuba Murder of Empress Elizabeth of Austria by Italian anarchist
1899	Tolstoy, <i>Resurrection</i> Chekhov, <i>Uncle Vanya</i>	Anglo-Egyptian Sudan Convention Boer War begins Philippines insurrection (1899-1901)
1900	Conrad, <i>Lord Jim</i> Freud, <i>Interpretation of Dreams</i> Colette, <i>Claudine at School</i>	Boxer Uprisings in China King Umberto I is murdered by an anarchist Gold Standard Act in US
1901	Kipling, <i>Kim</i> Mann, <i>Buddenbrooks</i> Chekhov, <i>The Three Sisters</i> Strindberg, <i>Dance of Death</i>	Death of Queen Victoria, accession of Edward VII William McKinley assassinated; succeed by Theodore Roosevelt Anglo-Japanese Alliance Work on Panama Canal begins
1902	Bennett, <i>Anna of the Five Towns</i> Gide, <i>The Immoralist</i> Gorki, <i>The Lower Depths</i>	End of Boer War US coal strike Triple Alliance renewed again Arthur Balfour Prime Minister of England
1903	Conrad, <i>Typhoon and Other Stories</i> Mann, <i>Tonio Kröger</i>	Entente Cordiale between France and England established Wright brothers make sustained flight
1904	Barrie, <i>Peter Pan</i> Chekhov, <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> Blok, <i>About the Lady Beautiful</i>	Russo-Japanese War Bolivia and Chile Treaty

Year	Age	Life
1905	32	March, <i>The Troll Garden</i> , short story collection, containing 'Paul's Case' and 'Sculptor's Funeral'. Spends time in the American West with Isabelle McClung
1906	33	Moves to New York in May to join the staff of muckraking <i>McClure's Magazine</i> , later serving as its managing editor (1908-11). Lives in same apartment building as fellow Nebraskan Edith Lewis, who later joins her at <i>McClure's</i>
1907	34	Publishes four short stories
1908	35	In February, while on assignment in Boston for <i>McClure's</i> , meets Annie (Mrs James T.) Fields, the widow of Hawthorne's publisher, and Sarah Orne Jewett, who becomes an important influence on Cather's fiction. She moves into an apartment with Edith Lewis, who continues to live with Cather until her death in 1947
1909	36	Begins friendship with the poet Zoë Atkins. Travels in May to London and meets William Archer, H. G. Wells and Ford Madox Ford. Sarah Orne Jewett dies
1910	37	Meets Elizabeth Sergeant, a graduate who had submitted an article to <i>McClure's</i>
1911	38	Travels to England again for <i>McClure's</i> . Takes a leave of absence from <i>McClure's</i> in October to spend three months with Isabelle McClung in Cherry Valley, New York, where she revises her first novel, <i>Alexander's Bridge</i> , writes 'The Bohemian Girl', and begins 'Alexandra', eventually a part of <i>O Pioneers!</i>
1912	39	<i>Alexander's Bridge</i> begins serialization in February and is published as a book in April. From April to June Cather travels in the Southwest for the first time and explores cliff dwellings of the Anasazi. Returns to New York via Nebraska and visits a Bohemian settlement in Webster County

Year	Artistic Context	Historical Events
1905	Forster, <i>Where Angels Fear to Tread</i> Wilde, <i>De Profundis</i> Orczy, <i>The Scarlet Pimpernel</i>	Russian surrender of Port Arthur; Treaty of Portsmouth ends Russo-Japanese War. Sinn Fein Party founded in Dublin Theodore Roosevelt inaugurated for second time. International Workers of the World founded in US
1906	Galsworthy, <i>The Man of Property</i> Musil, <i>The Confusions of Young Törless</i>	Algeciras Conference Duma meets and is dissolved in Russia Occupation of Cuba by US troops
1907	Conrad, <i>The Secret Agent</i> Synge, <i>Playboy of the Western World</i>	Peace Conference at the Hague Oklahoma becomes state of US New Zealand becomes a dominion
1908	Forster, <i>A Room with a View</i> Bennett, <i>The Old Wives' Tale</i>	Union of South Africa Model-T Ford produced First Balkan Crisis Boy Scouts movement founded
1909	Bely, <i>The Silver Dove</i>	Taft President of US; Progressive Movement in US; copyright established NAACP founded
1910	Wells, <i>The History of Mr Polly</i> Rilke, <i>The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge</i>	Japan annexes Korea Square Deal policies of Roosevelt. Mann Act in US Death of Edward VII; accession of George V
1911	D. H. Lawrence, <i>The White Peacock</i> Mori, <i>The Wild Geese</i>	Moroccan Crises. Second Balkan Crisis. Chinese Revolution. Mexican Revolution started
1912	Mann, <i>Death in Venice</i> Jung, <i>Psychology of the Unconscious</i>	First Balkan War Sinking of <i>Titanic</i> Treaty of Lausanne New Mexico and Arizona admitted to the Union

Year Age Life

- 1913 40 *O Pioneers!* published in June. Cather interviews opera singer Olive Fremstad who becomes a friend, and begins *The Song of the Lark*. Travels to Virginia
- 1914 41 Hospitalized due to blood-poisoning. Visits Maine, Nebraska and the Southwest
- 1915 42 Death of Annie Fields. Cather visits Mesa Verde, Colorado, with Edith Lewis in August. *The Song of the Lark*, dedicated to Isabelle McClung, is published in October
- 1916 43 In April Isabelle McClung marries the violinist Jan Hambourg. Willa visits the Southwest, Wyoming, and Nebraska, renewing her friendship with Annie Sadilek Pavelka
- 1917 44 Cather discovers Jaffrey, New Hampshire, as an ideal place to work and escape urban life. She finishes *My Ántonia* there
- 1918 45 *My Ántonia* published in October
- 1919 46 Writes articles for *The Red Cross Magazine*