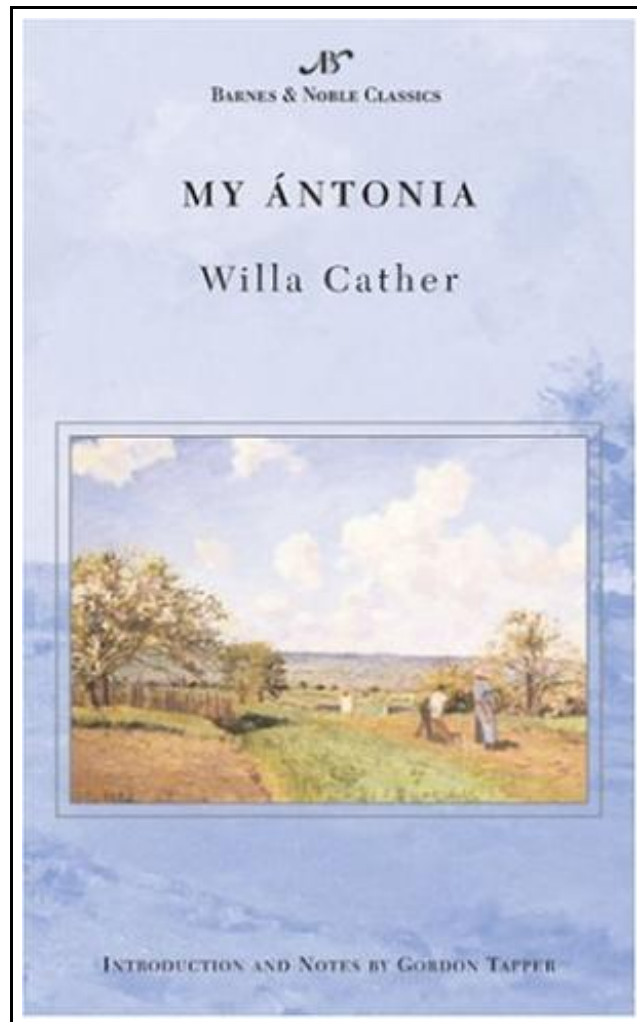


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Barnes & Noble Classics August 2005, 2005. Trade. Book Condition: New. Willa Cather called her Antonia "just the other side of the rug, the pattern that is supposed not to count in a story." Calling it so, she reveals its innovation. There is plot here, no doubt, and adventure. There are unforgettable, even cosmopolitan characters peopling these Nebraska plains, managing their affairs to different degrees of success, getting themselves tangled up in love's web. Here we find young Jim on the train from Virginia, a wide-eyed orphaned sent to live with his grandparents in Nebraska; and on the same train, Antonia, a Bohemian girl "bright as a new dollar" with her immigrant family. Both end up in Black Hawk, Nebraska -- a land where "there seemed nothing to see a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made." And that's how Cather flips her rug, tells us a story from the underside of things, from the land's point of view as much as any character's. Yet her characters live of their own accord. Farmhands Otto and Jake, their very roughness and violence making them defenseless with "no practiced manner behind which they could retreat and hold people at a distance" are made of the same stuff as the Norwegian beauty Lena or Antonia's father, a brokenhearted artist. Cather's limpid prose even transforms the morbidity of a coffin-making scene into cozy nostalgia without turning it saccharine. Jim may come late to recognize his love for Antonia, but that is of surprisingly little consequence in the novel's scheme. Antonia's own "rich mine of life" seems here to be the sufficiency by which all things gain their proper measure and proportion. As it should be.



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