

# My Antonia Essay: Psychoanalytic Criticism

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## Psychoanalytic Criticism of My Antonia

Abstract: This essay uses psychoanalysis as the strategy of interpretation to read Willa Cather's *My Antonia*. Freud's well-known theory--the Oedipus complex--and Lacan's theory of the Mirror Stage are used as the modes of approaching the novel.

I use psychoanalytic [criticism](#) as a means of interpreting [Willa Cather](#)'s *My Antonia* because I find some similarities between *My Antonia* and *Peter Pan*, between that and *The Awakening* when reading Keith Green's *Critical Theory and Practice: A Coursebook*.

In the light of Freud's Oedipus complex, like Peter Pan who sees Windy as a lover and mother, and who develops his sexual identity through this complex, Jim Burden also has a mother-like lover, Antonia, and finally comes to take his sexualized and gendered identity in this world. In the view of Lacan's Mirror Stage, like Edna Pontellier who wishes to return to her childhood memory, to return to the world of the Imaginary, in which "sometimes I feel this summer as if I were walking through the green meadow again; idly, aimlessly, unthinking and unguided" (Chopin 520), Jim Burden recollects his boyhood living in the great midland plain of North America where he feels he and Nature are one, but, unlike

Edna who goes back and does not come back, Jim goes into the realm of the Imaginary and comes back to [the Symbolic](#), experiencing the process of the Mirror Stage. These are the reasons why I try to apply psychoanalysis in the interpretation of the novel. General ideas will be given after the summary of the novel.

Willa Cather's *My Antonia* begins with Jim Burden's "an interminable journey across the great prairie of North America" (Cather 5), a journey back ...

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...one sometimes finds one's self behaving in bad dream" (Cather 158). After then, he feels he never want to see Antonia again; and he hates her as much as he hates Cutter. This accident pushes Jim to leave Antonia and to go to Lincoln for study.

The relationship between psychoanalysis and Willa Cather's *My Antonia* has not been defined. I hope that this essay is the first step towards seeing this wonderful novel from a new perspective.

#### Works Cited

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