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978-0-521-45905-1 - New Essays on My Antonia  
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NEW ESSAYS ON  
MY ÁNTONIA

The American Novel series provides students of American literature with introductory critical guides to great works of American literature. Each volume begins with a substantial introduction by a distinguished authority on the text, giving details of the work's composition, publication history, and contemporary reception, as well as a survey of the major critical trends and readings from first publication to the present. This overview is followed by a group of new essays, each specifically commissioned from a leading scholar in the field, which together constitute a forum of interpretative methods and prominent contemporary ideas on the text. There are also helpful guides to further reading. Specifically designed for undergraduates, the series will be a powerful resource for anyone engaged in the critical analysis of major American novels and other important texts.

*My Ántonia* is the Cather novel that is most often taught in high school and college courses, and the one that most readers try first when they approach Cather. It is at once her most autobiographical novel and her most aesthetically complex; it can be enjoyed both for its simple, pure prose and for its literary depth. The essays in this volume place the novel in the context of American literary history, African American music, feminist theory, and Southern writing, offering illuminating ways of reading Cather's best-known work.

Sharon O'Brien is John Hope Caldwell Professor of American Cultures at Dickinson College.

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★ The American Novel ★

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GENERAL EDITOR

Emory Elliott  
 University of California, Riverside

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## Contents

Series Editor's Preface  
*page ix*

1  
Introduction  
SHARON O'BRIEN  
*page 1*

2  
Time, Change, and the Burden of Revision  
in *My Antonia*  
MILES ORVELL  
*page 31*

3  
*My Antonia* and African American Art  
ELIZABETH AMMONS  
*page 57*

4  
Displacing Dixie:  
The Southern Subtext in *My Antonia*  
ANNE GOODWYN JONES  
*page 85*

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---

*Contents*

5

“It Ain’t My Prairie”:  
Gender, Power, and Narrative in  
*My Antonia*

MARILEE LINDEMANN

*page 111*

Note on Contributors

*page 137*

Selected Bibliography

*page 139*

## Series Editor's Preface

In literary criticism, the last twenty-five years have been particularly fruitful. Since the rise of the New Criticism in the 1950s, which focused attention of critics and readers upon the text itself – apart from history, biography, and society – there has emerged a wide variety of critical methods which have brought to literary works a rich diversity of perspectives: social, historical, political, psychological, economic, ideological, and philosophical. While attention to the text itself, as taught by the New Critics, remains at the core of contemporary interpretation, the widely shared assumption that works of art generate many different kinds of interpretations has opened up possibilities for new readings and new meanings.

Before this critical revolution, many works of American literature had come to be taken for granted by earlier generations of readers as having an established set of recognized interpretations. There was a sense among many students that the canon was established and that the larger thematic and interpretative issues had been decided. The task of the new reader was to examine the ways in which elements such as structure, style, and imagery contributed to each novel's acknowledged purpose. But recent criticism has brought these old assumptions into question and has thereby generated a wide variety of original, and often quite surprising, interpretations of the classics, as well as of rediscovered works such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, which has only recently entered the canon of works that scholars and critics study and that teachers assign their students.

The aim of The American Novel Series is to provide students of American literature and culture with introductory critical

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guides to American novels and other important texts now widely read and studied. Usually devoted to a single work, each volume begins with an introduction by the volume editor, a distinguished authority on the text. The introduction presents details of the work's composition, publication history, and contemporary reception, as well as a survey of the major critical trends and readings from first publication to the present. This overview is followed by four or five original essays, specifically commissioned from senior scholars of established reputation and from outstanding younger critics. Each essay presents a distinct point of view, and together they constitute a forum of interpretative methods and of the best contemporary ideas on each text.

It is our hope that these volumes will convey the vitality of current critical work in American literature, generate new insights and excitement for students of American literature, and inspire new respect for and new perspectives upon these major literary texts.

Emory Elliott  
University of California, Riverside