

The trails of home as  
intrinsic character  
aspects in my  
Ántonia



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

A famous princess held captive by a beast once sang in the Beauty and the Beast musical by Ashman and Menken, " Home should be where the heart is, and never were words so true." This idea clues in a relevant truth that resonates throughout Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* and is embraced by protagonist Jim's perception of home. Opening his journey midst childhood, he is seen going through a self restart at a young age, and through what he establishes as home, a fresh look at his character is offered. Home has a lasting impact on character throughout life, and this premise is exemplified through how overtly derivative Jim's traits are from his friendship with Ántonia. Memories that have been effectively innate in self will rise up to the surface of character as life continues. The first treasured memory can hit very close to home. Jim's perception of life as filtered through his acquaintance with Ántonia in *My Ántonia* demonstrates the lasting, intrinsic influence of the idea of home on character traits and decisions throughout life.

Friendship with Ántonia resets Jim's remembrance of home. Diving into the beginning of his narration, Jim initiates a youthful self at a point of emotional exhaustion, with many allusions to the move into the countryside as a " complete dome of heaven," the place where he " felt erased, blotted out" (Cather 7). He is only aimlessly motivated to live and close to giving up. The underlying dependence of his on a friendship is only noticed when he meets Ántonia. What follows is an immediate bond that precludes the amount of inner alignment the two achieve from the relationship. Jim self-adopts himself into the family, and even Ántonia's father perpetuates Jim's illusion of home further with a fatherly gesture that pulls Jim into the idea of family

provided by *Ántonia*. The two become inseparable very quickly, learning life's lessons together as they forage through school kid adventures, a notable tale being the "circus monstrosity" of a snake Jim slays (25). Home becomes the countryside, the setting of Jim's roots of belonging and the frame of his childhood adventures with *Ántonia*, his eternal sidekick.

Jim clings to his memory of home, mummified in the state of experience, and it causes him to remain similarly in the mindset backdropped by country experiences with *Ántonia*. As the book transitions the majority of characters to the townside, Jim refuses the assimilation of the orthodox town ways. He is considered "something queer" and odd to associate with the country girls once exposed to the improved affiliation of townsfolk (105). At first, there is a palpable discomfort as he struggles to find a place in the balance between the rapport of his schoolmates and the preservation of his ties with his immigrant childhood friends. Yet he ends up treading over to the belittled side that whispers home: sneaking out to dances, even becoming a little silly. He hormonally confesses his love to *Ántonia* and flits around with *Lena* as well. Soon after, even when Jim is forced to sober up and progress to the adult expectations of schooling and the University a move away, his mind is still blocked by memories, being forever caught in the mindset of home. He notes that he could never be a scholar, because "mental excitement was apt to send me ... back to my own naked land" (125). When he finds a trace of his old roots, a past loved girl from home, at his front door step, Jim latches on aggressively with the intent of sapping any trace of his recollections left, using this friend as both artifact and acquaintance. *Lena* and he spend a desperate amount of time together, each seeking refuge in

the other in the expansive environment unfamiliar with their countryside history. Eventually, by the time the entire journey of adolescence and maturity is finished, Jim has preserved his memory of home to remain intact and vicariously conjurable in “the best days,” as stated in his chosen epigraph (xi). Other friends do not show this obstinate mindset after time dredges on and surroundings change, encouraging him to go back after passed time and visit *Ántonia*. It takes an eternity of twenty years before he finally brings himself to retrace his steps to home. He is not pleased at the horrors of time, and the way it has thieved his childhood remembrance. To Jim, *Ántonia* looks older, and he struggles to bring his thoughts to the intimate traits of her as to look at this scene with fondness. Gone are the days of pristine memory, and this visit spurs Jim with a need to search deeper for his unconditional love for his friend. His original home has weathered and eroded. Growing older is a sin, and Jim does not cope well with facing the changes of what he remembers as his centrality. The early impressionable impact of *Ántonia* is so great for Jim that it has become something he continually pursues throughout all the character decisions that shape his life.

*Ántonia*'s effect on Jim is evident as his actions and traits can be seen as derived through the shadow of *Ántonia*'s involvement in his life. From the point of youth, Jim hates when *Ántonia* acts pretentious and the “superior tone that she sometimes took” (24). There can be noted a want of his for the two companions to be harmonized and equal. Yet *Ántonia* has a power over him that he may choose to not be aware of. She is the one that propels his educational journey, telling him authoritatively that he is “going away to

school and [making] something of [himself]" (109). He moves to the University, and that is where he ultimately makes the connection for readers of the epigraph to his story. His obedience goes to support the observation that Jim is awed by and admiring of Ántonia, as he even tells her face-to-face, " I'd have liked to have you for ... anything that a woman can be to a man" (152). This closeness expressed makes it sorrowful that Jim is the one to make it out of the country, yet his motivation and most influential mentor is still stuck in a perpetual winter of hard work and hard life. However, because of the empathic link between the two, Ántonia's approval of Jim's endeavors is the parallel to the subordination of Jim's course of life. Ántonia has helped establish and build Jim's childhood, so her footprints continue to remain prominent throughout his life. She is overjoyed at his return twenty years later and has not lost any sense of pride in this brother of hers that has gained more than she could ever hope for. Their intertwined connection is described like he once said to Ántonia, " You really are a part of me" (152). Jim is subconsciously content to live in the comfort of Ántonia's affectionate shadow, for that is where he most successfully cultivates as a person.

Home shapes character, identity, and the individual walk of life. For Jim, Ántonia has become an embodiment of home. Everybody has a home that impacts their life in ways that is not perceptible until it is lain beside childhood directly in the gaze of analytication. Any intentions of obstructing the fact do not matter because the effects of childhood identity and home are inescapable. People who move away always end up coming home. People with a sense of belonging treasure it so much it leaves a seen mark on their lives. Children are chided to considerately think of what others

experience behind closed doors, because home can be that intrinsic facet in character, that countenance masking every action. Like Belle sang, “ Home is where the heart is,” and the heart dictates the direction of life that carves your character.