



The Lost Traveller

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When Clara returns home from the convent of her childhood to begin life at a local girls' school, she is at a loss: although she has comparative freedom, she misses the discipline the nuns imposed and worries about keeping her faith in a secular world. Against the background of the First World War, Clara experiences the confusions of adolescence - its promise, its threat of change. She longs for love, yet fears it, and wonders what the future will hold. Then tragedy strikes and her childhood haltingly comes to an end as she realises that neither parents nor her faith can help her.

The Lost Traveller is the first in the trilogy sequel to Frost in May, which continues with The Sugar House and Beyond the Glass. Although each is a complete novel in itself, together they form a brilliant portrait of a young girl's journey to adulthood.

The Lost Traveller Details

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From Reader Review The Lost Traveller for online ebook

Bryn (Plus Others) says

I should perhaps reread this as my memories are hazy, but I remember it being powerful and painful.

Fiona says

I wanted to read the whole set by Antonia White. It follows the heroine through her time in a convent to her first job as a nanny to a young boy and her marriage..

Rhonda Cutler says

I had never heard of Antonia White. But Joan Wickersham, who wrote the glorious News From Spain, recommended this book on her website. And I am so, so happy I took this advice. I won't go into the plot, as that has been covered thoroughly by other reviewers. I will just say that I was totally drawn in by the characters, their complexity and authenticity, the credible contradictions in their personalities, their yearnings, deceptions, and occasional cruelties, both intended and inadvertent. The writing is glorious, the tragedy toward the end of the book heartbreaking. I have just bought the two other books in the trilogy. One Frost in May is about the protagonist Clara (though called Nanda in this book) as a youngster, versus a teenager in The Lost Traveller. The other, The Sugar House is about Clara as a young woman. All three, though novels, are loosely autobiographical.

Diane says

"Frost in May", Antonia White's powerful story of her time spent in a soul destroying convent finished in a dramatic way as Nanda is expelled for attempting to write a romantic novel. In "The Lost Traveller" she is rechristened Clara and the book opens as Clara is recalled from school to attend her grandfather's funeral.

Even though it is a continuation of the first book (although written 17 years apart) things and people are different. In the former book the end is shattering with Nanda's relationship with her father almost destroyed but this book finds Clara returned to her family very much the golden girl. Her parents are not the shadowy figures of formally but fleshed out - her father Claude's conversion to Catholicism is detailed as well as his devotion to a father not really deserving of such care and who also didn't have much time for his only son. His mother is

forever at the mercy of Isabel, Clara's mother. The first book had her weak and ineffectual, not really caring about her husband's conversion, just content to go along without too much inconvenience - with more spotlight on her she becomes a predatory force, forever dropping snide and belittling comments to Claude's mother.

Years of the stifling confines of the convent have given Clara a detachment towards any outward signs of emotion, especially towards her father. Pervading the whole book is the almost odd protectiveness Claude feels toward Clara - it comes across as a not very pleasant Victorian father and daughter relationship. When Claude finds her in an innocent tete-a-tete with her cousin Blaze his anger is explosive but as he muses, his life has not been the success he hoped and he wanted something in it to be perfect (his daughter) but she has shown him she is only too human. Later on Claude fantasizes about how lovely it would be for he and Clara not to be father and daughter - a bit odd but as a watcher of silent movies it is amazing how often that theme comes up ("Lazybones" (1924), "Laugh Clown, Laugh" (1928)) and it is definitely a holdover from the morbidly repressed Victorians.

The mood continues as Isabel, fooled by Clara's glib manner, delves deep into the mysteries of child birth and why the Catholic church has a lot to answer for - Clara, inwardly, becoming more and more horrified. Between her mother's selfishness and her father's mercurial moods is it any wonder Clara is less relaxed at home and seeks interests that take her away - even a stint as a governess!!

That escapade precipitates a crisis and sends her into the arms of Archie, someone she has nothing in common with, just as a comrade in arms to help keep her irrepressible little charge, Charles, amused. It also brings to a head her relationship with each of her parents. Claude had always repressed the embittered feeling that he had no sons but the War has bought it to the surface and his anger at Clara's involvement in the accident knows no bounds. He has no sympathy for what he feels is her gross negligence. By the time she is home, newly engaged to Archie, her father has done an about face - all because he is so impressed with Archie's wealthy Catholic family but in yet another crisis, Clara finds solace and understanding in the arms of her mother.

Barbara says

Like some other readers, I liked Frost in May more - but I wonder if that is, for me at least, because it was easier to read, more of a piece as it were. In Lost Traveller, we are drawn into the lives, especially the inner lives, of many more characters, notably her father and mother amongst several other vital and compelling minor ones.

At first, sympathy and interest is all directed to Clara (btw, does anyone know why White changed the name from (Fer)Nanda?) and it is easy to find her father somewhat of pompous and self absorbed bully - and her mother a die-away and equally self absorbed ex-Beauty. But none of them are these things, all three have complex and unexpected attributes, often attractive, sometimes decidedly not . Personally I was very happy White did not develop Mr Batchelor's romantic feeling towards Clara. Indeed, it is cleverer and more complex than that, his Victorian attitude ranges from mad rages at the idea that some man has touched her - and he blames Clara that it happened at all, bringing out the old patriarchal saw than no girl is ever handled or approached against her will, to seeing her as a Cambridge don and/ or mother to many Catholic children.

Mrs Batchelor, survivor of several stillbirths and lingering gynaecological problems is under no illusions as to what Catholic marriage entails, but still hopes for Clara to be happily married. Though for her, love is mandatory for happiness .

Clara herself, through almost all the book inhabits a fervid interior world of poetry, scholarship, intense (and often tedious) self reflection, romantic notions abounding , though not about love exactly as such notions are completely uninformed by anything remotely resembling an adult understanding of sexuality. Indeed to me, at the end, despite being engaged to be married, she seems to me to exhibit no greater maturity in this regard than she did at 13, though she been instructed by a competent and trusted friend.

It is a masterful and compelling book, and I look forward to reading the sequels, even when there are times when White compels you to think you just want to shake Clara and tell her for heaven's sake STOP banging on about yourself and your interminable feelings and look outward and do something for someone else. Anybody else, except perhaps father, that is. Especially true when she is involved in a tragedy and is unable, it seems, to rise above her own part in it and her own guilt and her own and so on and so forth . This leads her into a situation, the resolution of which gives her mother the chance to at last take on the role of wise parent, a role you just know she will be bitterly punished for.

Read Frost in May first - then this, and see if you are not seriously impressed with Antonia White

PS, I hate the cover , very inappropriate

Meredith says

It doesn't have the crispness that made Frost in May a classic in my view. But the progression Clara and Isabel make are interesting. In my view Isabel is the best drawn of the main characters and the most interestingly developed by the writer. Clara's father is not really drawn sympathetically at all....we see quite a bit of his thinking but a lot of it is pretty flawed and perhaps his flaws are not those that many will relate to.

Clara herself is described with clarity and understanding but she too I don't seem to understand thoroughly. Why she has so little feeling for her mother and so much for her father isn't quite apparent. Also some thought processes or feelings are described impartially, or are hinted at but not followed through.

Overall a good read, looking forward to the sequels.

Once again I must state that I hate the covers Virago has chosen to use for books by this author.

June Schwarz says

My favorite in the quarter, by far. I had rather too much in common with Clara in some ways, and this book made me very nervous when I first read it.

Zen Cho says

Found it absorbing, though I don't know if it's actually any good. But will read more if I can find it anyway. Father ghastly. Was relieved to see the mother become more sympathetic as book progressed. All the stuff about Catholicism very interesting, particularly from my puzzled heathen standpoint.

Ali says

the lost traveller

This was my final read for August, and I must say I absolutely loved it. Antonia White is mainly known for her quartet of novels which began with *Frost In May*, which was the first ever Virago Modern Classic. I re-read *Frost in May* about two years ago and although I enjoyed it – there was something a little disturbing about the story of the breaking of a young girl's spirit. I have now collected each of the remaining three books of the quartet together – and I am so glad that I have.

In *The Lost Traveller* (which is apparently very autobiographical) Nada Grey of *Frost in May* has become Clara Batchelor – and *The Five Wounds School* has become Mount Hilary, but they are essentially the same place.

As the novel opens in 1914 Clara is fourteen, her paternal grandfather has just died, and with her father Claude grief stricken at the demise of the parent he had undeservedly put on a pedestal – Clara is called home from her Catholic boarding school for the funeral. Clara's mother Isabel is a strange cool creature, irritated by her mother-in-law – she adores her daughter – but feels Clara's reserve toward her very keenly. Clara both adores and fears her father; terrified of his disapproval she does what she can to please him.

At the heart of this novel is the complex relationship between Clara and her parents. Clara is an only child of Catholic converts, Claude a respected school master, and Isabel a fragile beauty whose ancestors were quite grand. Claude is ambitious for Clara – with a scholarship to Cambridge in mind for her, Isabel is less keen on the idea of a bluestocking daughter, wanting her only to be beautiful. Just as he worshiped his father, Claude worships his wife; Clara resents her, hating the way she speaks to Claude and her grandmother. The relationship between Clara and her father verges on the ever so slightly disturbing, Clara is a daddy's girl, and yet the relationship with her father doesn't always bring her happiness, at one moment revelling in a shared confidence or appreciation of a piece of music – the next made miserable by one of Claude's dreadful rages.

“Oh thank you, Daddy. You do look magnificent,” she said, pinning on her flowers and gazing at him with admiration. Evening clothes suited him; they set off his fairness and made him seem taller. Never, she thought, had she seen him looking so young and handsome.

She giggled with sheer happiness.

“I never thought I'd go to the opera with you in your opera hat, I do feel grand.”

He offered his arm.

“Your carriage is waiting.”

To her amazement, it was no mere taxi but a hired car with a chauffeur in livery. A hired car was the very greatest of luxuries associated only with the most solemn family feasts such as her parents’ wedding anniversary. Never before had he ordered one just for Clara.

“Daddy you are spoiling me,” She said, leaning back on the thick grey cushions.”

Clara is irritated and even repelled by her mother’s affection. Isabel knows only too well the realities of a Catholic marriage, she wants her daughter to marry, but insists she must marry for love, in her terrible ignorance of the facts of life; Clara is bound to misunderstand her mother. Isabel is a wonderfully drawn character, often unhappy and jealous of Clara and Claude’s relationship. The one thing that Clara and Isabel seem to agree on is Pagets Fold, the Sussex country home of Claude’s family, a small house with 40 acres, where his two spinster aunts live in a sort of caretaker role. Clara and Isabel love the aunts and for Clara, Pagets Fold represents an idyll to which she looks forward to returning each summer holiday.

Shortly after the death of her grandfather, Clara is forced to leave her Catholic boarding school – that has become a blissful haven from home life – as her father can no longer pay the fees following a mysterious illness of her mother’s which resulted in high doctor’s fees. Clara will spend her final year of schooling and subsequent sixth form at a protestant day school. Saddened at the loss of her friend Nicole de Savigny – who Clara instinctively knows she will be unable to keep up with – their social orbits being of an entirely different kind, Clara fears her removal from the place where she feels safe. However at her new school Clara makes two particularly good friends, who serve to help Clara develop a little bit of spirit and creative flare. No longer quite as buttoned up, Clara starts to blossom, and is no longer quite sure that Cambridge is for her. On the brink of womanhood, and in the middle of the Great War – Clara leaves her family to spend six months as a governess in a good Catholic home, where she will be treated as one of the family and able to re-connect with her Catholic upbringing. Here Clara is supremely happy, reverting almost to childhood in her antics with her young charge. However when the first really tragic event of her young life comes along, Clara is really tested. Clara needs to work out how to heal herself and move forward.

Sherah says

Every time I read this book I enjoy it more. To be fully appreciated, it needs to be read alongside its sequels, The Sugar House and Beyond the Glass.

Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

No, wait just a minute here. None of you have read Frost in May?! Nevermind..... Go out and get Frost in May and then come back here for the Trilogy.

Canadian Reader says

“I don’t think I want to be anything. In fact, I hate thinking about the future at all.”

“How do people become real? Does one just change as one gets older? Or did something definite happen

to you?"

On the brink of the Great War when Clara Batchelor is almost 15, her grandfather dies and her mother, Isabel, becomes seriously ill with “female troubles” related to a dangerous, later-in-life pregnancy. Having had to finance Isabel’s costly operation, Clara’s father, Claude, can no longer afford to send the girl to Mount St. Hilary Convent School, where prominent Catholics send their daughters.

White not only tells the story of Clara, now back at home and attending the Protestant St. Mark’s Girls’ School, but she also spends a good deal of time on the two people who exert the greatest influence on the girl: her intense, conflicted, and emotionally disturbed father and her beautiful, narcissistic mother. Clara’s new friendships with two Jewish girls—the studious Ruth Philips and the flirtatious, high-spirited Patsy Cohen (whose lively, busy and noisy home provides a significant contrast to Clara’s dark and quiet one on Valetta Road)—are also explored.

Claude Batchelor converted to Catholicism when Clara was a child of seven. The ritual, the pomp, Claude’s self-identified “feudal temperament”, and a compulsion to rein in dark urges and a sinful nature were all factors in his decision. Claude’s relationship with Clara, though not literally incestuous, is certainly emotionally so. His reaction to her budding sexuality is alarmingly inappropriate. Claude is demanding, controlling, and ambitious for his daughter. A boys’ school classics teacher who would have preferred a son, Claude sees academic potential in his daughter and attempts to steer her towards Cambridge, at a time when few women attended institutions of higher education.

Clara is, however, “the lost traveller” of the title. She is rudderless after leaving the convent school. She belongs neither to the Catholic world nor the Protestant one, and though she claims she does not want to marry, she also rejects life as a bluestocking. She ends up taking a position as a governess to a precocious, spoiled ten-year-old boy, Charles Cressett, the only heir to a wealthy, old Catholic family in Worcestershire. Once installed in the Cressetts’ Jacobean great house, Clara meets a young man from a nearby estate who is even odder and more adrift than she, Archie Hughes-Follett. “From babyhood,” we are told, “he had attracted accidents and misfortunes of all kinds or [had] been the innocent cause of accidents to others.” A soldier, now at home convalescing after a grenade explosion that killed another man, Archie, is another only son of a wealthy old Catholic family. Clara’s meeting with this young man proves to be a fateful one, life-changing and tragic.

The Lost Traveller is an intense, absorbing, “old-fashioned” (in the best sense) read. It explores not only the adolescence of a young girl but the lives of her parents (and their influence on her). Though there are melodramatic elements, characterization is strong, the writing can be quite evocative, and White creates a convincing portrait of a girl who cannot find her way.

Paul says

This is the second of Antonia White’s series of four novel about a girl growing up in a Catholic family in the early twentieth century. At the end of *Frost in May* Clara (she was known as Nanda in the first book, White just decided to change her name) has to leave the convent school and start at a local girl’s school. The book opens in 1914 when Clara is 14 and we follow her for the next three years. White captures the usual adolescent problems of love, parents, friendships, what to do in life, religion and so on. It could easily be an average coming of age tale; but it is more than that.

White captures the sheer intensity of being 16/17. Clara battles with whether she should continue studying

and go to Cambridge, she worries about whether she has a vocation to be a nun and eventually decides to spend a few months being a governess to a boy from an Old Catholic family, away from London in the country.

So what lifts it above the mundane? The characterisation of Clara's parents (based on White's own parents) is very strong. Her father in particular with his strong emotions; almost wanting to live through his daughter, but there is also a disturbing edge to his character:

"Oh thank you, Daddy. You do look magnificent," she said, pinning on her flowers and gazing at him with admiration. Evening clothes suited him; they set off his fairness and made him seem taller. Never, she thought, had she seen him looking so young and handsome.

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This is almost a seduction and there is a slightly sinister edge to Claude's character. There is a temptation for the reader to think they are over-reacting and it is entirely innocent until very near the end of the book when Claude is alone with one of Clara's friends at a time of high emotion. His behaviour then confirms the previous suspicions. Clara's mother also has her trials and tribulations and her almost affair is a revelation. The backdrop to it all is the Catholic faith and the restrictions it places on the characters.

There is a significant tragedy in the book; the first real tragedy in her life which almost destroys her and will resonate through the rest of her life and the effects will flow through the rest of the novels in this series.

Given White's own history and battles with her own mental health, you can see the beginnings here of what Clara will have to face in the future. Although this could stand alone I think the books are much better read in sequence.

Pipkia says

God, but this is miserable. Brilliant. But miserable.
