



The Town

Conrad Richter

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Winner of Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, 1951

The Awakening Land trilogy traces the transformation of Ohio from wilderness to farmland to the site of modern industrial civilization, all in the lifetime of one character. The trilogy earned Richter immediate acclaim as a historical novelist. It includes *The Trees* (1940), *The Fields* (1946), and *The Town* (1950) and follows the Luckett family's migration from Pennsylvania to Southeastern Ohio. It starts when settler Sayward Luckett Wheeler becomes mother to her orphaned siblings on the frontier, and ends with the story of her youngest son Chancey, a journalist in the years before the Civil War. *The Town* won the 1951 Pulitzer Prize and received excellent reviews across the country.

The Town Details

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From Reader Review The Town for online ebook

Gwen Haaland says

"The Town," the third in Conrad Richter's famous Awakening Land Trilogy, is more than an interesting educational classic. It is a must read for all Americans. It will enable you to get as close as you can to living vicariously at the time our pioneering ancestors first began to migrate westward with the intention of settling permanently. They began with the mindset of conquering the supposedly endless forest. A few generations later, perceptions began to shift. In this third book, one comes full circle through the main character's eyes. Beautifully written.

This series is on my top shelf of favorite books and has withstood the test of time.

Harold Titus says

What distinguishes a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel from well-written novels that do not win prestigious awards? I would assert a deeper exploration into the psyche and behavior of the human species. I would also suggest an undertaking of far greater depth and scope than the attention-gaining, quick-moving, character-conflict- resolution-end of story kind of novel. I believe "The Town" meets these conditions.

I appreciated these three themes.

The accomplishments that one generation achieves and the people who achieve them are too frequently discounted by people of succeeding generations tempted to believe, because their lives have been made easier, that they are more enlightened, superior.

Every child born of the same parents is different from his/her siblings, but all, usually, adopt the broad values inculcated during their upbringing. But there can be outliers that parents may never direct.

Great harm can be done to innocent children by cruel attitudes and acts of adults who adhere to rigid moral codes.

Intertwined in the revelation of these themes are two important characters: Chancey Wheeler, the youngest of Sayward and Portius Wheeler's ten surviving children, and Rosa Tench, Portius's illegitimate daughter.

Chancey Wheeler is the outlier of the Wheeler children. Unlike his siblings, he is born with a delicate constitution. He is sickly, physically weak, and seemingly handicapped by a weak heart. During his first several years of life he is frequently carried to places in and close to the family house rather than be expected to walk. Deprived of normal activity, he spends most of his time inert. Much of that time he fantasizes.

He resents his siblings' robustness. In his late teens he acknowledges the reasons for his dislike of them. "They were so sufficient to themselves, he thought. That was it. Nothing stopped them. Any one of his people could go it alone, ask for no quarter, do without your help. ... If only there had been another in the family puny, lazy and cowardly like he! Just the thought of having such a brother or sister, perhaps one even worse than he was, lifted him up, made him feel better. But his mother wouldn't admit he was puny or

cowardly or anything else that wasn't good. He was strong as anybody else, she claimed. ... But nobody could make that much out of him, Chancey told himself, for none understood him save Rosa."

He believes his mother resents him. He convinces himself that Sayward and Portius are not his parents and he longs for the day when his real parents will take him away. He tells fantastic stories – for instance, he rode in to town once on the back of a red cow – and insists that they are true. As he matures, he resists doing menial work. In his middle teens he meets Rosa Tench and finds her to be an unthreatening, accepting soul. Eventually, he leaves the home and starts a career as a newspaper editor. He is harshly critical of Sayward's generation and of his oldest brother, Resolve, who has become governor of the state. He steadfastly believes that his mother is cruel to him by insisting that he not be soft and lazy. Eventually, Sayward blames herself for his shortcomings. "Where she made the mistake was letting a little sickness coddle him. Had she brought him up rough and tumble like his brothers and sisters, he'd know how to call back worse names than he got, and then the others would be glad to leave him alone."

He rejects everything Sayward values -- especially the virtue of hard work -- which he believes are old-fashioned, out-of-date. In his late teens he and Sayward have this conversation.

"This spring he tried every excuse to get out of working in the lot and garden. When she held him to it, he cried out it was a disgrace. She was thunderstruck though she tried not to show it.

'Why is honest work a disgrace?' she wanted to know.

'It's all right for those who have to,' he told her. 'But you're the richest woman in Americus and I'm your son and yet we have to go out and work like hired men in the field.'

It came to her mind to say, I thought you said you weren't my son, but never would she cast that up to him.

'Work's the best thing we can do, Chancey,' she said."

Caught up with fanciful notions of an enlightened society – justification to excuse his aversion to work -- he responds this way.

"... progress will do away with all toil and labor in time. ... There'll be no rich people and no poor people, just brothers and sisters. And everybody will have security and happiness.'

Sayward answers.

'Making a body happy by taking away what made him unhappy will never keep him happy long. The more you give him, the more he'll want and the weaker he'll get for not having to scratch for hisself.'"

Chancey is an unsympathetic character throughout the novel.

Rosa Tench is the consequence of Portius's marital infidelity with the town's school mistress, Miss Bartram, who marries a local laborer, Jake Tench, prior to Rosa's birth. These events occur in Conrad Richter novel, "The Fields." Neither Rosa nor Chancey know of their blood relationship. Mrs. Tench, following Rosa's birth, becomes an isolate, never leaves her house, is slovenly, lives only to identify with characters in novels. Rosa is an entirely different child than are her brothers, who are ordinary and rather crude.

We meet Rosa initially in a fascinating scene fairly early in the novel.

Portius, suffering a high fever, is being nursed back to health. Rosa's father, in a drunken state, wanting to prick Portius's conscience, sends Rosa to the Wheeler house with a batch of flowers. Sayward answers a gentle knock on the front door.

"Her slender legs looked like they never belonged in that coarse gray calico dress she had on, and her white face had the singular shape of one of her blossoms. Washed and rightly dressed and combed, she would be oddly beautiful, Sayward thought. Now the little girl just stood there, not saying a word."

Sayward gets Rosa to identify herself.

"The sound of the name gave Sayward a turn. For a minute she just stood looking. So this was the child conceived in sin by the pretty school mistress who, they said, looked like a hag now, and would not set foot out of her house since the babe was born, nor would she wash or comb! Why, the girl was no bigger than Chancey, though she must be a year or two older. And now Sayward knew, with the feel of knife in her side, who the girl looked like.

Did the girl know it, too? Her face quivered.

'I brought some flowers for Mr. Wheeler,' she said, very low, holding out her handful.

'I'm sure he'll be much obliged to you,' Sayward told her, sober as could be, taking them from her, steeling herself, hardening her hand toward the soft clinging feel of those fingers. Now how much did the child know, she wondered. 'Did you bring those your own self or did somebody tell you to?' she asked.

'My father told me.' The girl's eyes were like the most ethereal of wide slaty gray liquid curtains that threatened to be torn down."

Sayward recognizes Jake Tench's intent.

"... just the trick Jake would play on some highly respectable bigwig ..., send a bastard child to him with flowers when he was sick, but Jake would have to be mighty tipsy to play it on his own foster child and Portius. Why, he had threatened death on any who told Rosa that she was not his own, or so she heard."

Sayward has to leave to tend Portius. She instructs Rosa to sit just inside the front door to wait. When Sayward returns, Rosa is gone. Her daughters Huldah and Libby are at the door.

"Where is she?" she asked them.

'Do you know who that was?' Huldah leered at her.

"Of course I know. What did you do to her?"

'We didn't do anything,' Libby said. 'We just looked at her, that's all.' But her face said, 'We sent her home a flying.'

'I can imagine how you looked at her,' Sayward said sternly."

This scene foreshadows Sayward's difficulty accepting Rosa's existence and the Wheeler children's and Portius's rejection of Rosa throughout the novel. It also foreshadows Rosa's victimization by her mother,

Jake Tench, and others in the community.

By accident Chancey and Rosa meet in town. They discover that each feels estranged from their families. Rosa takes Chancey for walks in the woods to enjoy the beautiful isolation of nature that she craves. Chancey sees in her a sanctuary from his feelings of inadequacy and the resentment he feels toward his mother and siblings. They grow older, continue to meet; their meetings become known to their families; they are forbidden by them to meet. Portius has the sheriff warn Rosa and Chancey of the consequences of their continued meetings. After a subsequent meeting, Rosa's mother says awful things to her.

"Don't all right me, Miss Rosa! If you don't want to tell your own mother, I can't make you. But don't tell her either, when the law brings your sin out in court. Don't say I didn't warn you. Never did I dream I would have a daughter such as you!"

Their meetings are not sexual, as the public and family members suspect. Each provides the other emotional release. Unlike Chancey, Rosa is a sympathetic, almost beloved character. We respond to her anguish when she looks through the windows of the Wheeler mansion and marvels at the advantages the Wheeler children have compared to what she must endure.

"Wasn't it the saddest thing in this world that you always had to be yourself, that you couldn't be somebody else, that never, never, never could you be the person you most wanted to be?"

I was furious at the outcome of her conflict.

I valued also other aspects of this novel. For instance, the story, covering many years, mirrors real life. Tragedies occur, challenges must be met, characters age, children are born, "progress" happens. At the end of the novel the town is nothing like what the land had been when Sayward, a child, was brought into the deep forest by her father and mother at the beginning of the novel "The Trees." All three of Conrad Richter's three novels about the Lucketts and Wheelers have an authentic feel about them that causes their readers to believe such a place existed.

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Steve says

The final book in the trilogy. You join the main character as she nears the end of her life. Her life and the life of the society around her has experienced mighty change. In the beginning her family was one of the first, hearty souls to move into the untamed forest. There followed the replacement of forest with fields and the eventual creation of a town. The story engenders interesting reflection on the relative values ascribed to the different peoples and lifestyles experienced by the different characters, including a little girl taken from her white family and raised by an Indian family as one of their own.

Patricia says

The last of the series. The Trees have been cleared, the farms have become successful, now it is time to move to town. I highly recommend this series. I will never forget Sayward and the Wheeler family. A perfect way to learn history and appreciate the early settlers as you will never read any better description of their day to day lives.

Carol says

I read this trilogy in 1979. I know that most of you were too young to even read that year but I highly recommend them. The author was able to bring to life what life was like for the women that helped to settle this country. As I was struggling with raising my own family, it helped to remember just how easy my life really was. Enjoy!

Etta Mcquade says

The final novel of "Awakening Land" series in which Sayward completes her mission and lives to see her family grow up. "The Trees" has progressed into "The Fields," and, finally, "The Town." I can't recommend these books any more highly.

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Hana says

A satisfying conclusion to Conrad Richter's family saga about pioneer life in the Ohio River Valley. Nothing could top The Trees, but I was pleased with the way the series wrapped up. As the trees are finally beaten and burned into submission, as a town grows up where once all had been wilderness, the old sense of community gives way to a rush of commerce, of getting and spending. Throughout, there is a sense of melancholy for all that has been lost, rather than a triumph at what has been gained. A thought-provoking Thanksgiving Day read.

Much of the latter half of the novel revolves around Sayward's youngest son, Chancey who is something of

an anomaly, a quiet young man, a bit of a loner in a large, gregarious, energetic family. I'm an outlier among my GR friends since I rather liked Chancey and, being somewhat like him myself, I appreciated his struggles. The resolution at the novel's close was touching and believable.

Lucia Lazorova says

Simple story of a pioneer woman Sayward Wheeler and her family set in growing town of Ohio describes many aspects of daily life with a combination of history and the traditional beliefs, customs and stories of a community with some memorable scenes, e.g. sleighing party.

Thomas Wood says

After reading the first two books in the series, which are very nice, I was pleasantly impressed with *The Town*. It is a much more evolved novel in comparison. There are multiple points of view throughout, more interesting character interaction, and a more defined philosophy. I don't want to ruin it for any would be readers, and I hate to review by comparison, my advice is to read all three novels back to back to back. Reading as the writer develops is an intriguing subtext to the story.

Julie says

This novel concludes the trilogy of pioneering family clan, Luckett-Wheeler. It has been a very long time since I have been so moved by a novel -- indeed I was enraptured by the entire series. I find myself still fading into 19th Century Ohio, and meeting Sayward's ghost out of the corner of my eye, she is still so present within me. Richter does for 19thC America what Dickens did for 19thC England: vivid, animated, theatrical; brilliantly painted. I could pull out the thesaurus at this time, and just use all the words therein to describe a scintillating read, and that might just be enough!

The Town encompasses the span of Sayward's life as she makes the move from "cabin to county seat", but we are left wondering if, after all, civilization is not a double-edged sword. When we first encounter Sayward, in the first book of the trilogy, we battle the paradox of nature with her: the cruelty and the kindness of it; the beauty, and its darkness. Similarly, we explore those themes within this last novel, but this time battling with the paradox of humanity: whether we are better off as simple citizens of the world, struggling daily for our bread; or whether the work of the mind is the nobler struggle. Richter leaves no doubt which he champions -- but I will not spoil the exploration for you!

If you are looking for a good, old fashioned read, that engages mind and soul, and demands something of you, while entertaining you beyond measure, this is a must-read!

Dorcas says

Last book in "The Awakening Land" trilogy. It seems odd rating them individuality, it feels like they should just be one 600 page book, in which case I would give it 4.5 stars.

Anyway, this was good, for the most part it wrapped up the characters from the first two books and we finally find out what happened to Suli (I'm not telling, though) as well as Sayward's father and Rosa the school teacher's daughter (interesting relationship there between Rosa and Chancey).

Some things are left a mystery which I suppose is realistic but had I been Sayward I would have made it my business to find out about Portious' past.

Some reviewers complain that this book focuses too much on Chancey, Sayward's youngest rather spoiled, sickly child. I didn't really find this so. You do need some direction in a story like this and he was most representative of the next generation, wanting things easier, despising the older pioneering forefathers, thinking that the flaccid, lazy man of today was going to be the world's salvation tomorrow etc. But it wasn't all about Chancey. How could it be when the author needs to wrap up a whole community of people? And the author does this well.

I think "The Town" was a strong finale to this trilogy.

Sonia says

Although Richter won the Pulitzer for this third book of The Awakening Land trilogy, it was my least favorite. The Town seemed to revolve around Sayward's last child, Chancey, who seemed to have an obnoxious teenager's mentality/personality his entire life.

As in all the books, the action seems to move in spurts, sometimes giving great detail and then referring back to things that have happened off-stage (things I would have liked to hear more about) with no explanation.

I liked the way Sayward came to terms with "the trees" which she hated in the first book and ended up planting around her home in the last book because she missed them once they were all cut down.

Tom Metz says

Okay, we have reached the heartbreak conclusion of Conrad Richter's The Awakening Land series. If you liked the cheery ending of The Good Earth, then you will love this one. Seriously, the worse things get, the more noble Saird Luckett Wheeler becomes. Is nobility the consolation for sorrow? I hope Saird finds it sufficient. She deserves better, don't we all. I live in Worthington, Ohio, and our local history maven told me that Richter set his fictional town on the real-life Scioto River, in the Columbus neighborhood known as Franklinton. I can believe it. But the flinty Saird Luckett is pure Pennsylvania. I will miss reading about her.

Lillian says

I read The Trees, The Fields, and then The Town one after the other. They follow the story of one girl who grows up in Ohio after walking there with her family from Pennsylvania to the Ohio Territory. Rather a grown up version of The Little House in the Big Woods. Makes me thankful to be living today. The pioneers were very strong in body and mind.

Tweety says

I'm not sure what to rate this, 3 1/2?

It's a good conclusion, nearly everything is wrapped up and it's as well written as the first two. My problem with it was mainly Chancey, who if I'd liked him would have been fine. Unfortunately he made me mad. and the whole last half of the book had me glad it wasn't all about him, and wishing that he would grow up.

would I recommend you reading this? Yes, you really can't miss the concluding tale. Am I glad I read it? I wouldn't have missed it, I'd have always wondered what happened to Sulie. Would I reread it? Maybe, right now I really don't know.

That said, Sayward is as steady as ever, and I think she's my favorite character in the series. I had hoped Portius never grew on me, in fact by the end I had the feeling he had a winner in Sayward and she had drawn the short straw. Oh, well. This series is realistic. Not everything goes perfect.

I'll probably revise my review later when I'm more she of my opinion on it.

Lisa says

I absolutely love this series. I read it over and over again, probably twice a year at least. I would love to know if anyone has any ideas on what happened to Portius in the Bay State that made him come to Ohio and live as a Solitary? I know Sayward thought it was a woman, but when Portius' father wrote to George Roebuck, he told him that the "that business" back home had been settled.

Just wondering anyone else might think or maybe found out in research, etc.

Nick says

I was actually a little disappointed in the final book of what was otherwise a wonderful trilogy. The new character of Chancey was a major drag on the overall tone of the story. I believe Richter was doing this to make a point about how the current generation views past generations, but Chancey was so negative as to drag down the tone of the story as a whole. Additionally, the character's issues were finally resolved in literally the last three pages of the book: not quite the catharsis I was looking for from such a negative

character. As a whole though, the series was very well written and researched, and paints a vivid picture of the settlement of the early frontier and America's journey from colony to nation.

BookSweetie says

A literary feast! My five stars is less for the THE TOWN (1950) alone and more for its being the culmination of THE AWAKENING LAND trilogy that included THE TREES (1940) and THE FIELDS (1946). (The three books came out separately before being joined in one volume initially during the 1960s.)

** I would not recommend reading THE TOWN without reading THE TREES and THE FIELDS first. Together they offer an astonishingly satisfying novel of the late 1700s and early 1800s in the pioneering world of the Old Northwest Territory (Ohio River country).

Readers follow the life of the unforgettably hardy fictional female Sayward Luckett from her childhood encounter with the densely forested Ohio River frontier (in TREES) to her early adulthood (in THE FIELDS) to her later life and the lives of her children in THE TOWN.

Conrad Richter received the PULITZER award in 1951 for this chronicle of ordinary pioneers and their far from ordinary lives. He researched the geography, history, folklore and language of the pioneering frontier of the newly formed American nation and transformed that research into a novel. I most admire the author's ability to inhabit the inner lives of the characters and to give their stories an authentic feel using language and dialog that emerge from a linguistic world now past.

Penney says

Don't understand why this third novel in the trilogy won the Pulitzer. Veering away from the admirably understated purity of the first novel, The Woods, it becomes melodramatic, ugly, and overwrought. Disappointing.

Tracy says

4.5 stars

I loved this trilogy, and especially the heroine, Sayward Luckett, who is featured in all three books. This last book is told from several points of view, and covers 40ish years wherein the Luckett/Wheeler family and their growing town Moonshine Church change completely from a forest settlement into the County Seat, and Sayward from a woodsy to the richest woman in the area, moving from her cabin to a mansion her husband builds in town.

Sayward changes very little, even though everything around her changes tremendously. She is a great, interesting character, and I enjoyed reading her voice through all three books.

I wish there were more books about the remaining characters, I'd like to see what becomes of her children, and especially the youngest, Chancey, who is featured a lot in this book, and is nearly the polar opposite of his hard-working, simple woodsy mother.

