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Bird Cloud: A Memoir Of Place



BIRD CLOUD

ANNIE PROULX

Pulitzer Prize-winning author of
The Shipping News and *"Brokeback Mountain"*

"A fascinating book written in razor-sharp prose . . . the Pulitzer Prize-winning author at her best . . . All of it comes together like the ingredients of a glorious meal. The reader is lucky to be invited to her table." —SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE



Synopsis

Part autobiography, part natural history, *Bird Cloud* is the glorious story of Annie Proulx's piece of the Wyoming landscape and her home there. "Bird Cloud" is the name Annie Proulx gave to 640 acres of Wyoming wetlands and prairie and four-hundred-foot cliffs plunging down to the North Platte River. On the day she first visited, a cloud in the shape of a bird hung in the evening sky. Proulx also saw pelicans, bald eagles, golden eagles, great blue herons, ravens, scores of bluebirds, harriers, kestrels, elk, deer and a dozen antelope. She fell in love with the land, then owned by the Nature Conservancy, and she knew what she wanted to build on it: "a house in harmony with her work, her appetites and her character, a library surrounded by bedrooms and a kitchen. *Bird Cloud* is the story of designing and constructing that house" with its solar panels, Japanese soak tub, concrete floor, and elk horn handles on kitchen cabinets. It is also an enthralling natural history and archaeology of the region "inhabited for millennia by Ute, Arapaho, and Shoshone Indians" and a family history, going back to nineteenth-century Mississippi riverboat captains and Canadian settlers. Proulx, a writer with extraordinary powers of observation and compassion, here turns her lens on herself. We understand how she came to be living in a house surrounded by wilderness, with shelves for thousands of books and long worktables on which to heap manuscripts, research materials and maps, and how she came to be one of the great American writers of her time.

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Customer Reviews

It is common for a reader who enters an Annie Proulx novel or short story to find that it grows on you page by page, layer by layer, as her sure carpentry builds a fine and strong effect. That was my experience with the non-fiction "Bird Cloud." If in her best fiction Proulx carpenters untold stories into life, this new work finds Proulx retelling old stories, resurfacing tales of history, geology, geography, climate, biology. Her evident pleasure in doing so means that many readers will be pleased with the telling. Take note of the book's cover, a photograph well-selected by Proulx herself, for it is a true harbinger of what the 234 pages inside will bring. It is not a mistake that you cannot see the house whose three-year construction (2004-2006) some publicity material and some reviews mistakenly suggest is the main subject of the book. You are right to imagine the sky and the rangeland extending to the horizon hold multitudes. "Bird Cloud" is not a Wyoming version of "House," Tracy Kidder's 1985 book that meticulously recounted the planning, design and construction of a New England custom home. Proulx offers us no blueprints, no floor plans, no budget details, no additional photos. Yes, she parcels out a few practical "how-to's" and a selection of vignettes (mostly about construction snafus and disappointments), but the house-related material occupies less than half of the book's content. The building is not where Proulx fixes her emotional energy.

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