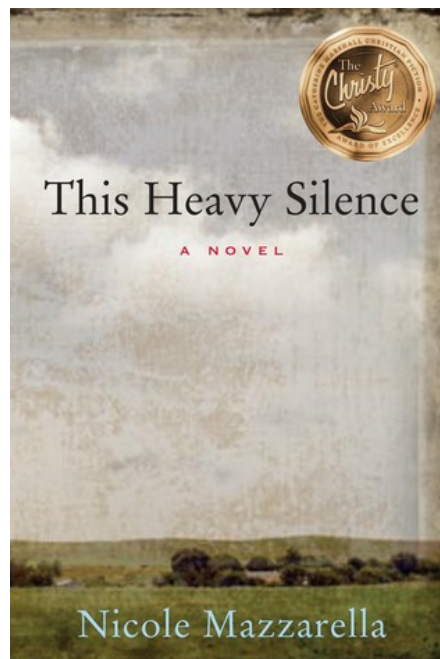




This Heavy Silence

Nicole Mazzarella

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Strong, resilient, and deeply loyal, Dottie Connell farms her family's three hundred acres in rural Ohio alone, having sacrificed love and family for land she does not own. A sudden, inexplicable event leaves the daughter of her childhood friend in her care. Pressured by her community to allow her former fiancé to raise the child, Dottie must face the past she has worked fifteen years to forget. Spanning a decade, *This Heavy Silence* explores the power of the vows we make to others, and, more binding, those we make to ourselves. Evoking the hardship, spring-fed beauty, and the complexities of community in the rural Midwest, this beautifully observed novel leads us to question our ideas about motherhood, faith, and the debts we owe.

This Heavy Silence Details

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Author : Nicole Mazzarella

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From Reader Review This Heavy Silence for online ebook

Rachel says

I was given this book to read for Christmas and enjoyed it. It received the "Christy" award so I wondered if it would have the same affect on me as the book "Christy" did. (I enjoyed reading the story very much but was left wanting more at the end).

It did leave me a bit unsatisfied at the end as I wished to see more loose ends tied up. The main character was definitely not very sympathetic. It was hard to stay with her as she continued on in her bitter, prideful, selfish ways without seeing her own faults. But, the writing was compelling and I did find myself rooting for her to find some sort of satisfaction in the life she had instead of the life she thought she wanted. There were a few quotes that I found myself reading a second time because they made me think twice or chuckle aloud:

- "I walked quietly back down the stairs to my office where I would work until they left. When you believed in a God who climbed into flesh to interrupt history, taking over someone's kitchen could seem caring." p. 55
- "The breath upon earth created my flesh, and my flesh took on the shape of a woman under his hands. I had never known a sweeter regret." p. 135

The title of the book gives clues that silence will be a theme in the book. The silence throughout the story was at times deafening. I wanted at times to reach through the words and shout all the unspoken things hanging between the written words. There is probably a whole other book that could be written with all the unsaid words in this story. I thought the author did a great job of writing these stilted conversations though. Having been in a few myself, they felt very authentic. I wanted the characters to talk things out more, but in the end I was frustrated with the characters, not the writing.

I probably would have given it 5 stars if I wasn't such a hopeless romantic/ happy-ending-loving reader!

Deb says

Dottie tells her story, one of a farm woman with a deep love for her land. Dottie thought she was content with her solitary life on the farm, but when her best friend dies she has to take in her little girl. That girl and a hired hand form Dotties family, but when forced to decide between them and the land the land just might win out. Will Dottie ever learn that letting people into her life might just be what she needs?[return]This book, told from Dotties point of view, is heavy on introspection and heartbreaking situations. It would be a downer, but there is a glimmer of hope for the main character at the end, that she has actually learned something and will choose a better path. This is a good read for when you're in the mood for something slightly heavy to reflect on.

Bobbi says

The main character was stubborn, proud, and boring. This made it hard to read. The writing was forced, and overly dramatic, but still fell flat. I'm not sure why I finished this book.

Sue Mika says

Read it for a church book club discussion. It is much more compelling reading than I expected. A woman has

given up everything for a 300 acre farm she doesn't really own. She really only knows how to relate to the land. She just can't figure out people. It makes you think about how to be a good mother, about your faith, and debts we owe ourselves and others. It's a very good book.

Melanie Griffin says

I'm giving this 3 stars because it is a gutsy book, especially as a first novel. The protagonist, a self-centered, manipulative middle-aged woman is hard to like -- impossible, really -- and it is in first person! It is hard to pull that off and still have readers willing to finish the book. In fact, there aren't many sympathetic characters in the book at all. Yet it is the characters that carry the book, and their slow transformations make it an interesting read.

I wish the author had fleshed out the "best friend" Zela character and her challenges more fully. Her unhappy marriage is a major underlying element in the story, but it's just not dealt with enough. It's too important to leave so vague. I guess the bottom line is that the characters and sense of place are done well, but the plot could use some work.

Bethany says

While browsing in the new fiction section of my local library, I noticed the spine of this book with the author's last name: Mazzarella. Arrogantly, I thought, "I only know one Mazzarella, & she is a professor at Wheaton. I bet it's her!" And laughed cynically. Well, it was her. And I changed my cynicism to an attitude of wishing I was with someone I knew, so that I could tell them, "Hey, I know this woman..."

In any case, I enjoyed this book. It tells the story of a woman named Dottie Connell, who spends her days fighting to keep her family land and raising her best friend's daughter after a tragic accident. Mazzarella teaches creative writing at Wheaton, but I always thought of her as one of our "poetic professors." I found her images - while powerful - distracting; it seemed to me like this was a novel written by a poet. Beautiful, but slightly more scattered than what a practiced novelist would write. Having said this, I am looking forward to future work from Dr. Mazzarella. Her eye for the extraordinary amid the humdrum will carry her, along with her readers, far.

DKM says

This novel rewards patient, mature readers who appreciate literary writing. It is impressive not only as a first novel, but also as a memorable work of literature. Mazzarella clearly has a gift and uses it well. The lyrical beauty of her writing immerses the reader in a possible world that chafes and soothes, repels and invites. Dottie is difficult to like—much less to sympathize with—but it is a testament to Mazzarella's craft that despite Dottie's off-putting choices, the story inexorably draws in the reader while deftly balancing the tensions that Dottie engenders and encounters.

Alex Joyner says

Nicole Mazarella's book, *This Heavy Silence*, comes with a seal of approval as a 2006 Christy Award winner in the first novel category. Like Catherine Marshall's *Christy*, it, too, has a gauzy, hilly landscape on the cover, but its protagonist, Dottie Connell, is no Julie Andrews in the Alps. Dottie is a hard-bitten farmer who has been tending her Ohio family farm since her brother's untimely death as a child. When we meet her in 1962 she is dealing with a fire that has killed her friend and friend's husband on a night when their young daughter, Mattie, is staying over with Dottie, who is now managing the farm on her own.

Mattie changes Dottie's life, resurrecting old conflicts and possibilities with Dottie's old flame, Morris, who, with his new wife, wants to adopt the child. Dottie resists the overtures, in part because the money Mattie's mother had entrusted Dottie to oversee for her is a way to save the farm from villainous relatives. Momentous decisions made in the first part of the book come back to haunt Dottie in the second part, set in 1972, when Mattie reaches adulthood.

Read my full review on Heartlands: <https://alexjoyner.com/2019/01/05/hou...>

Full disclosure: I received a review copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for my honest review.

Marsha Carlson says

A wistful story with interesting insight into the trials and tribulations of farming with some atypical plot twists. A good read!

Stephanie says

Good writing style, but the character was boring and selfish. Just...blah.

Sara Diane says

I picked this up on a whim. The title caught my eye in the library. It isn't the normal sort of story I look for, it is somewhat historical fiction.

Mazarella weaves an amazing tale of a woman who is trying to farm her father's land when she inherits the daughter of her best friend.

The novel takes us through Dottie's struggles--from wanting to take her brother's place after his death, the scorn of a marriage that never happened, the truth behind her friend's death and the realization that most of her struggles are from her own making.

The prose was beautiful and well written. There were many times I had to stop and just admire Mazarella's descriptive language. While this isn't a book I would gush over, and it won't make me giddy, it was an amazing book.

Melody says

Dottie Connell is a middle-aged farm woman from Eastern Ohio. She is unmarried, but not unloved, and no stranger to lovemaking (a fact that would surprise the local townsfolk). With a modicum of success, she farms, and longs to own, the land her father farmed. But she struggles to place herself in community, holding herself apart, unable to develop sincere attachments to the people who come in and out of her life.

When Dottie's best friend dies and leaves her 8-year old daughter in Dottie's care, the woman and the child must learn to make a life for themselves in the midst of economic trials, self-deception, and betrayal.

Now, some of you will know that my four-star review of this book is necessarily biased. After all, I have worked with Nicole for the last 4 years. But I what I didn't know, until reading this book, her first novel, is that in addition to being a gracious colleague and excellent teacher, Nicole is a remarkably honest and skillful storyteller. So much so, in fact, that I completely forgot I was reading a friend's work, and became fully engrossed in the characters. If you enjoy novels of place and of character development, this work richly develops both, leaving its readers with a bittersweet challenge to our longing for independence.

Shannon says

What a painful, but good book. The title of the book is apt because when I finished reading it, I felt the impact of the book sitting heavily on my chest.

It was interesting timing to read this book after finishing *Dreams from My Father* yesterday, because the questions that book raised were shadowed in this book. The main character, Dottie Connell, is a case study in what life is like without community or family.

Dottie is admirable in her determination to pursue the career she loves - farming - and the author's portrayal of a female character in a traditionally male occupation was well written. But my overall emotional imprint from this book is sadness because Dottie lets farming become a driving passion that consumes everything else in her life.

I don't think I'm in danger of living life like this character. I thoroughly enjoy my jobs, but I think the very fact that I use the plural (jobs) is illuminating: I don't see my work for a non-profit as my only job. This book would have been just as sad if Dottie had made parenting all consuming. I think my take away from this book is the danger of loving any one thing to the exclusion of all else.

Carolyn says

Finished this book a few days ago and can't decide if I really like it. The main character, Dottie Connell, is a single middle aged woman trying to run 300 acre farm in the 60s and 70s. She ends up raising a friend's child and has to confront some of her issues in the process. Here's what I liked:

- 1) The book is beautifully written. I was surprised on this one since she is a professor at the college and not a full time writer. Had this book been picked up by a secular publisher I think it would have had much more circulation.
- 2) It is interesting: a mysterious death, an orphan, an inheritance, a love triangle . . . kept things interesting

for being set on a farm.

Here's what I didn't like:

- 1) I wasn't crazy about the ending since I have a Dickensian longing for all books to get all loose ends tied up and end with everyone happy.
 - 2) Poor Dottie describes herself as being "stout" with a body made for hard work and later describes her hair as being very short with a tight perm. Despite my desire for all characters to become romantically attached to someone, I had a hard time rooting for farm-gal Dottie with her badly permed hair.
 - 3) This is my biggest hang up with the book: it is "Christian" but as far as I can tell, the main character never comes to Christ . . .? ? This woman is profoundly lonely and isolated and has a "come to Jesus" moment but seems to only use it for personal maturation. It has left me wondering all week about the message of the book. I do not find a true "Christian" message here which is what I was expecting.
-

Joy says

Her writing reminds me of Wiley Cash, Marilyn Robinson or Jane Smiley. So many lessons in this book...some will be frustrated because so much is wasted in Dottie's life and all doesn't end well...pretty much like life :-).
