

# **The Clan of the Cave Bear Study Guide**

## **The Clan of the Cave Bear by Jean M. Auel**

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# Introduction

The story concerns a young girl named Ayla who is orphaned by a natural disaster and then adopted by a group known as the Clan. Ayla is very different from the Clan: physically, she is blond and blue-eyed and the people in the Clan are stocky and dark; she is expressive, sensitive, and smart and they are dour, plodding, and cold. Historians and anthropologists immediately reacted to Auel's book, maintaining that her assumptions about Neanderthal life were not realistic. In fact, Auel seems to be basing her view of the Neanderthal on the racially motivated "bad" science of late nineteenth-century French anthropology. It is precisely this "bad" science and overt racism that has prompted many anthropologists to denounce the novel.

However, the reading public truly seems to enjoy the novel that sold over one hundred thousand copies in the first three months after its publication. *The Clan of the Cave Bear* is an original work of fiction that explores the world of human beings in prehistoric times. Her novel has even inspired fans to write sequels about the Clan available on the World Wide Web ([www.onebridgehome.com/ altauel](http://www.onebridgehome.com/altauel))

## Author Biography

Jean Auel was born in Chicago on February 18, 1936. She moved to Oregon and attended Portland State University, receiving her M.A. from the University of Portland in 1976. It was not until after she had raised five children that she began to write poetry and fiction. In fact, *The Clan of the Cave Bear* started as a short story exploring Auel's interest in Paleolithic humans. As Auel asserts, "the story led to research, the research fired my imagination, and the wealth of material made me decide to write a novel." The original manuscript was almost one half-million words long and was rejected by several publishers.

In the mid-1970s, Auel began revising her mammoth manuscript. She rewrote *The Clan of the Cave Bear* four times. Finally, in 1978, she found a publisher willing to devote the time and resources to publishing the series. The novel was finally published in 1980. Over the following twenty-two years, she published three more novels in the series: *The Valley of the Horses* (1982), *The Mammoth Hunters* (1985), and *The Plains of Passage* (1990).

Although she continues to work on the Earth's Children Series, Auel admits that she wants to

tackle something lighter next time. She currently lives in Oregon with her husband.



# Plot Summary

## Part I

Jean Auel's *The Clan of the Cave Bear* chronicles the story of a prehistoric girl, named Ayla. As the novel opens, Ayla is a young child when her parents are killed in a violent earthquake. She wanders aimlessly for days, starving and alone. In her delirium of hunger, Ayla wanders into a valley that is home to massive cave lions. She survives a lion attack by hiding in a rock crevice, but a lion is able to scratch her left thigh. Ayla's thirst finally drives her from her hiding place and she is found by the Clan woman, Iza. The woman rescues the child.

Iza belongs to the Clan, a group of humans that are looking for a place to live after the earthquake had destroyed their home too. Brun, the leader, is worried that the spirits are angry with him. After several weeks, Brun decides that they should turn back. Just before he makes this announcement, Iza tells him that Ayla has found a home for the group. The new cave is large and convenient in terms of water, weather, and food sources.

Brun decides to let the oldest son of his mate, Broud, join in the hunt for the first time. The successful hunt allows Broud to become a man and allows the Clan to move into the cave. However, Broud must share his coming-of-age ceremony with naming ceremonies for the two Clan infants and Ayla. He is resentful of her presence right away, foreshadowing later problems.

At the ceremony, Iza's brother, Creb, names her as if she were a normal Clan child. Iza is stunned, because this means that Ayla is her daughter. However, Creb goes even further: for her totem, Creb names the Cave Lion one of the most powerful male totems known to the Clan. The people are shocked by the adoption and floored by the totem. Ayla has become Clan and it is Creb's and Iza's responsibility to train her to be a good Clan woman.

## Part II

After the disastrous Cave ceremony, life begins to settle down for the Clan. With great difficulty, Ayla learns to speak in the Clan hand gestures and stops making most sounds. Besides communication, Ayla has other problems. She stares into the hearth areas of other families and at men (strictly forbidden). She runs and does not show the proper fear of men, especially Broud. Creb and Iza are very concerned about Ayla's future with the Clan. Ayla slowly begins to understand the ways of her new people—but she is still the outsider, the strange one.

Iza gives birth to a daughter named Uba. Since Uba was not a boy, Iza could stay at her brother's hearth and raise her two girls. Ayla loves her little sister; always treated as an outsider, now she has a companion and friend. As she grows, she develops an interest



in healing from her mother. This causes some concern at first, but the Clan soon accepts Ayla's strange healing nature.

While out gathering wild cherry bark one day, Ayla watches the men practice hunting. An old hunter is trying to teach a young boy how to hunt with a sling, a difficult task for Clan men since they cannot fully rotate their arms. In fact, Broud cannot work the slingshot well, which pleases Ayla. After the men abandon the practice area Ayla goes and picks up the discarded sling. Slowly, she teaches herself how to use the weapon and she develops an excellent shot.

Once when she is not as attentive as she should have been, Broud beats her to a bloody pulp. He is punished and, for a time, Ayla becomes more arrogant and disrespectful. When she realizes that the Clan was going to let Broud beat her when they felt she needed it, Ayla's fear turns to rage and she kills a porcupine. In that moment, Ayla feels power and regret. Ayla becomes determined to behave in proper Clan manner. All through that winter she works as hard as she can to be the ideal Clan woman. After the winter, Ayla decides to hunt predators, since she could not help her Clan any other way. She even develops a double-loading system for the sling that makes her a much more deadly hunter.

## Part III

By the time Ayla is nine years old, she has become accepted by many members of the Clan as a medicine woman in training and as a good luck charm. Ayla's role in helping her people grows with each major event. First, she heals Brun's burned arm with snow, an action Iza would not have thought of. Second, she saves Ona from drowning when the Clan is out catching sturgeon.

Yet her most impressive act is when she saves Braec, Broud's son, from a hyena during the mammoth hunt. Without even realizing what she has done, Ayla kills the hyena with a quick fire from her sling. She kills the animal before Broud and the other hunters can even react. For saving Braec's life, Ayla is condemned to death for one month. Ayla's death sentence forces Creb and Iza to destroy all of her possessions and she is traumatized. For several days she really believes that she is dead, but she clings to Brun's words that she can return in a month. Ayla makes sure she will survive to return.

After she returns from the dead, Ayla's status in the Clan is even higher. Broud cannot stand that Ayla has yet again stolen the spotlight from him. She is even allowed to hunt, much to Broud's displeasure. This is when he decides to start sexually assaulting her. Within Clan culture, Ayla cannot refuse any Clan male; Broud's delight in her hatred and disgust for what he is doing to her only fuels his desire more. She has overcome everything else about him, but her unwilling consent to his sexual assaults only makes them more frequent. Only when she discovers that she is going to have a baby does Ayla become ambivalent to him. He soon stops assaulting her after that.



Ayla's son, Durc, is born after a difficult pregnancy and birth. When the Clan thinks her baby is deformed, she takes her baby and flees. If a baby lives for seven days, then it must be accepted as Clan. Brun does not want a woman to force him to do anything and will kill Ayla and her child when she returns. Ayla finally realizes this and returns early, begging Brun for his forgiveness and mercy on her child. Brun forgives and life returns to normal as the Clan prepares to go to the Great Clan Gathering.

## Part IV

The last section of *The Clan of the Cave Bear* describes the Great Clan Meeting and its aftermath. Once every seven years all the Clans in the area get together for a grand festival where they kill a captive Cave Bear raised by the host Clan from a cub as way of communing with the Great Bear Spirit. At these meetings the medicine women of Iza's line prepare a special narcotic drink for the Mog-urs and the other men. However, Iza is too ill to make the journey and the other Clans do not accept Ayla as a woman of Iza's line. It is not until she risks her life to save a young warrior wounded by the angry Cave Bear that the Clans accept her.

She prepares the drink, but accidentally swallows some. The narcotic effects cause Ayla to wander into the cave and observe the men's ceremonies. Particularly damaging is that Ayla, a woman, becomes a witness to the most sacred of all Clan ceremonies. She watches in horror as the Mog-urs eat the brains of the warrior slain by the Cave Bear earlier that night. Creb recognizes her presence and realizes that all the old ways are at an end.

When the Clan returns to the cave, they discover Iza on the verge of death. Ayla frantically tries to save her, but she is too late. At the age of twenty-nine, Iza dies an old woman and is buried inside the cave with the highest Clan honors.

Brun and Creb decide that they are both too old for their jobs and pass them on to a new generation with disastrous consequences. Broud agrees to take Ayla as his second woman, but will not let her keep her son. The Clan is shocked. He then insists that Creb move his hearth to a much colder, windier place in the cave. Although Ayla was able to suppress most of her anger at being separated from her child, she will not let Broud punish Creb. She verbally attacks him and defies his orders. Broud reacts in characteristic anger and orders the new Mog-ur, Groov, to curse Ayla with death. Groov hesitates, but complies.

At that moment the earth begins to shake much like it did at the beginning of the novel. Ayla is cursed and the cave is destroyed. Creb is found dead lying over Iza's grave. Ayla slowly and calmly packs her belongings to leave forever after she has Brun's and Uba's promises to take care of Durc. Ayla's last act is to force Broud to acknowledge her presence even though she is dead. Ayla leaves the Clan.





# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

As the naked, precocious five-year-old leaves her hut in the morning to play, she has no idea that this day will be any different from any other. She swims in the river, enjoying the cool water, and has just gotten out to dry herself in the sunshine, when the earth begins to tremble. She is confused and tries uncertainly to make her way back to her hut. The trembling of the earth becomes more forceful, and a huge pine tree crashes down before her. A gaping crack appears in the earth, and before the frightened young girl can reach her hut, it is swallowed up into the crack, taking everything she has known or loved during her first five years of life.

The girl screams repeatedly, "Mother!" but the shaking has become so violent that she is unable to walk; she is repeatedly thrown to the ground by the tremors each time she tries to stand.

Just as suddenly, the gap closes, the trembling ceases, and all is still. Terrified, she looks around her. She begins to cry, as she realizes that nothing remains of her hut, her family, or anyone else. An aftershock of the tremendous earthquake sets the frightened young girl in motion, and she runs into the woods. It is her instinct to get as far away as possible, and she follows the river, stopping only to drink. She travels until she can go no further, and sinks to the forest floor, exhausted. She is cold, hungry, and scared, and sleep is long in coming. She wakes towards morning, screaming, as the distant rumblings that continue to shake the earth trigger memories that she will try to forget for the rest of her life. When dawn breaks, she continues traveling along the stream. She begins to feel hunger pangs and drinks more frequently for the temporary feeling of fullness. As the sun sets, she once again digs a small hole, covers herself with the dirt to keep warm, and falls asleep.

The child loses all concept of time, following this basic routine and the river. One day, as she stops to drink from the river, she detects a swift motion out of the corner of her eye. It is a cave lioness, stalking a herd of wild cows. Terrified, she turns and runs blindly in the opposite direction. What she does not realize is that she is running towards the cave that houses the lioness' cubs, and the lion that protects them while she hunts. The girl hears his protective roar and begins to run the other way. Instinctively, she finds a small hole in the face of the cliff. She squeezes her emaciated body into it and watches terrified as a lion paw, claws outstretched, enters the small hole. She tries to shrink away, shrieking in pain as the claws sink into her left thigh, leaving four parallel gashes.

The girl sinks into delirium, staying in the small cave for the rest of the day, that night, and the following day. An unbearable thirst finally drives her out. Her endurance holds out just long enough to get her to the river to drink. She then loses consciousness, falling to the ground on the bank of the river.



## Chapter 1 Analysis

Sheer bravery and determination saves the frightened young girl's life, after everything she has ever known has disappeared in less than a minute. Had she not hydrated herself, following the river steadily until she could go no further, she would surely have died before she was found. This primitive form of human has not fully evolved, but it is easy to see the intelligence and quick instincts that help the child to survive as long as she does. It is this same intelligence and determination that will set the young girl apart from the Clan that finds her, but in this moment, it is what brings her to them.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

A Clan of twenty travelers, who are left homeless with six fewer Clan members after the earthquake, are looking for a new cave. The men leading the group stop to examine something small that is lying on the ground in front of them. The leader of the women thinks to herself that it must be a meat-eater for the men to leave it and continue walking. The Clan rarely ate carnivorous animals. She is shocked to find that it is a strange, gaunt child. The woman is Iza, the Clan's medicine woman. Instinctively, she begins to tend to the child. Brun, Iza's brother and the Clan's leader, comes back to her and tells her to come away from the child. She is not Clan, he signals. She'll die if we leave her, Iza signals in response. Brun pauses, carefully considering the implications to the Clan, as well as what would appease or displease the spirits. He decides that Iza can take the girl or leave her, as she wishes.

They continue to walk, Iza with the young girl wrapped in the folds of her cloak. Iza's other brother, Creb, joins her. Although hideously disfigured, he holds the Clan's most powerful position, Mog-ur, or Clan magician. Not only is he this Clan's magician, but also, he holds the highest ranking of all the Clans. Creb is *the* Mog-ur, the most powerful magician of all. He nods his approval that Iza has taken the girl.

The Clan stops for the night, and Iza administers medicinal herbs and treatments to the unconscious young girl. She also prepares Creb's bed and serves him dinner. Iza's husband was one of those killed in the earthquake, so as Creb's sibling, she will now join Creb's hearth. Iza is not sad about her husband's death. He beat her frequently, and although this was his right as her mate, she resented him for it.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

We learn what this human race looks like when the author describes Iza, the medicine woman. "She was just over four and a half feet tall, large boned, stocky, and bow-legged, but walked upright on strong muscular legs and flat bare feet. Her arms, long in proportion to her body, were bowed like her legs. She had a large beaky nose, a prognathous jaw jutting out like a muzzle, and no chin. Her low forehead sloped back into a long, large head, resting on a short, thick neck. At the back of her head was a bony knob, an occipital bun, that emphasized its length. A soft down of short brown hair, tending to curl, covered her legs and shoulders and ran along the upper spine of her back. It thickened into a head of heavy, long, rather bushy hair."

That night after dinner, Creb conducts a ceremony with the men of the Clan. The ceremony is for the purpose of asking the spirits to help the Clan find a new cave. They pay homage to their totem spirit, the Cave Bear. The rituals are the same as have been conducted for hundreds of years. The Clan's life is guided by customs and rituals that

have not adapted to new environments. The author calls their unchanging ways "an attempt at survival, unconscious and unplanned, except by nature in a last ditch effort to save the race from extinction, and doomed to failure."

That night after dinner, Creb sits by the fire and ponders why he feels so uneasy about the girl Iza has found. She is obviously one of the Others, a new kind of human. More modern than the Clan people, the Others symbolize a change that Creb's race doesn't know how to accept.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

After a long night of delirious tossing and turning, during which the child utters sounds and words that Iza has never heard, the girl's fever finally breaks just before dawn. When she opens her eyes to the morning sunlight, she screams at the sight of Iza's dark swarthy face. Iza is just as surprised. She is certain that with such blue eyes, the girl must be blind. The girl understands, however, that Iza is trying to help her and becomes calm. They break camp quickly, and Iza carries the girl on her hip, in addition to the significant burden she normally carries, for the entire day.

By the end of the day, the girl is able to sit upright, propped up on a rock, while Iza goes about her duties. She talks to Iza incessantly. Not only does Iza not know what she's saying; Iza's vocal cords are not developed enough to make the same range of sounds that the child does. The other members of the Clan glance at her disapprovingly; they are not accustomed to noise at the hearths. They use only hand signals, glances, and a small range of grunting sounds to communicate.

After dinner, Creb comes over to see the child. He knows that his disfigurement repulses the other Clan members, so he is surprised when the girl reaches out to touch his scarred face. Her touch warms his heart, and a bond is formed between them. "Creb," he says to her, pointing to his chest. She points to herself and says a name that Creb, with his limited vocal chords, cannot pronounce. Ayla is as close as he can come, and the little girl is satisfied. She points to Iza, and Creb says slowly, "Iza." Ayla is so excited about her newfound friends that she impulsively hugs Creb. Because of his disfigurement, Creb has no mate, nor children, and this is the first hug Creb has ever received.

The next morning, the Clan sets out in search of a suitable cave. Around midday they stop, considering whether they should turn back or keep going. Iza lets Ayla down off her hip. The child immediately begins to explore. When Iza looks for her, she sees that what Ayla has been exploring is a huge cave. She runs back to Brun to announce the girl's find.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Although Iza's magic is described in terms of spirit language and spirit healing, her methods are valid. The Clanspeople are hunters and gatherers. The men hunt, the women gather food, and Iza gathers both food and medicinal herbs. Iza is one of the most respected medicine women of all the Clans. She comes from a prestigious line of medicine women, whose knowledge is handed down from mother to daughter, but also being transmitted through memories. Jean Auel describes these as "racial memories," or memories that are passed on to one's children. In other words, although Iza was

taught many things by her mother, there are also things she simply knows instinctively as memories passed down through her bloodline.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Upon examination, the Clan find Ayla's cave to be exactly what they need. They immediately begin to unpack their belongings and prepare for the ceremony that will claim the cave as theirs. As a further sign of favor from the spirits, Creb has found a skull of a Cave Bear in the cave, the Clan's totem.

Brun is elated by the discovery, but is still concerned about what to do with the child Iza has picked up. She is not Clan and has no totem. He decides to consult his wise brother, Creb, about the problem. Creb corrects the leader, telling him that the girl has a strong totem, as she has already survived a cave lion attack. She has also led the Clan to their new cave. Brun admits this is logical, but is then struck with the problem of whose hearth she would belong to. Creb offers his own hearth to Ayla, Iza, and Iza's unborn child. He has never asked for a mate, knowing that his disfigurement is repulsive to women. Now, Creb asks Brun why he shouldn't be given his share of food for himself and his family. Brun once again agrees with his reasoning, and the matter is settled for the moment. Creb promises to meditate on what the girl's totem should be. There are two other children in the Clan ready to receive their totems, and they can all receive their totems together.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Creb meditates on the children's totems by thinking about their characteristics, actions, and what each child's place would be within the Clan. He comes up with a boar for the young boy, Borg, and for a young Clan girl, an owl. He then focuses his energy on Ayla, the child of his own hearth. He recognizes her fearlessness and remembers her narrow escape from a cave lion. He falters, because tradition says a woman cannot have such a strong totem. He remembers the four deep scars on her thigh, however, and realizes that the cave lion himself has marked her with this totem. Four parallel lines are the sign for cave lion in the Clan's written language. Creb wonders why such a small girl would need such a strong totem, but he does not doubt the obvious sign of the cave lion spirit.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Creb tells Iza to prepare an for Ayla. Iza is happy, because this means that Brun has decided Ayla will stay with the Clan. Creb also reveals to Iza that she and Ayla would share his hearth, and Iza is even happier. After her abusive mate, Iza will be happy to share her brother's hearth. As a medicine woman, Iza has her own status in the Clan, yet she needs to be included in someone's hearth to receive her portion of food and provisions .

Iza takes Ayla to find an amulet and bathe her in the river. While they are out, the idea comes to Iza that, because the girl is ugly and has no status of her own, Iza should teach her to become a medicine woman.

The Clan's hunt tomorrow is important for several reasons. The success of the first hunt at a new cave indicates whether the spirits are happy or not with their choice. It is also Broud's first hunt, his manhood hunt. Broud is Brun's son. They are lucky enough to find a herd of bison, and although Broud is nervous about his first kill, he performs well and Brun is proud of him.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Iza has never revealed to anyone, least of all her deceased mate, that she has been taking medicinal herbs, ever since she was first given to him, to prevent his totem from overpowering hers. The Clan believes that a child is conceived when two totems fight, and the woman's totem is defeated, allowing the man's totem to enter her mouth. It is generally surmised that if a woman cannot become pregnant, it is because her totem is cannot be defeated by her mate's totem.





# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

The young are not the only successful hunters today. Two older men, Zoug and Dorv, who no longer hunt with the younger men, catch some smaller animals. The feast will be large and sumptuous. Broud is haughty at the thought of how well he performed. He knows he will be made a man at a ceremony tomorrow. Broud has already begun to act like a man, calling the women to do his bidding and showing off to Oga, the young girl destined to be his mate.

Iza is busy making preparations with Creb. For the first time, Ayla has interaction with the rest of the Clan. They stare at her curiously, until Ebra, Brun's mate, breaks the silence and sends her to get wood with Oga and Vorn, the two children closest to her age. Oga and Ayla get along well, and spend the afternoon together. The others spend the next 24 hours getting ready for the feast and the night of ceremonies that will follow it.

The first ceremony is Broud's manhood ceremony, where he is branded with a large gash in his chest, which confirms his manhood and the protection of his totem, the Woolly Rhinoceros. Then, it is time for children to receive their totems. The whole Clan is shocked when Ayla's totem is announced as the cave lion, which is one of the very strongest totems, even for a man. Ayla has stolen Broud's show, and he is furious. A hatred that will last as long as Ayla is with the Clan is born between them.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

As Oga and Ayla play together, the author steps back to reflect upon the differences and similarities of the two young girls. "The two girls were so different, yet so provocatively similar. Sprung from the same ancient seed, the progeny of their common ancestor took alternate routes, both leading to a richly developed, if dissimilar, intelligence. Both sapient, for a time, both dominant, the gulf that separated them was not great. But the subtle difference created a vastly different destiny."

In fact, this difference is the true theme of the novel. It is not Ayla's blue eyes that separate her from her new Clan, but evolution. Ayla has many of the same characteristics of the Clan, but is simply more evolved. This manifests itself in many ways, one of which is her relationship with the males of the Clan. Knowing that she is smarter and more capable than they, she is unable to adopt the same subservience that the other women of the Clan adopt effortlessly.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

The short summer is spent preparing for the long winter months ahead. The days are occupied with hunting, fishing, gathering, and storing food. Creb spends a lot of time with Ayla, trying to teach her the Clan's language. It is easy for Ayla to learn the verbal aspects of the language, but for a long time she does not comprehend the hand signals that are the Clan's main source of communication. Finally, she begins to understand, and after that moment she is constantly watching the Clan members. She works hard to learn the language and make up for all the time she has lost, unable to communicate.

Clan culture dictates that it is extremely impolite to stare into someone else's hearth. One day, Broud is being scolded by Brun, and he catches Ayla staring at him intently. She is merely trying to understand what is being said, but Broud is humiliated by what she has seen. Broud's hatred for Ayla is evident in his smoldering glare. Creb sees this and scolds Ayla for staring. Broud gloats. Ayla, having never been scolded before, and not understanding what she is being scolded for, begins to cry.

Creb is worried about the water coming from Ayla's eyes. He calls Iza over to examine them. Iza can see nothing wrong with them, but her heart is warmed by Creb's obvious concern for the girl's well being. She realizes that they have both begun to think of Ayla as their daughter, and Iza is happier than she has been since she was a child.

One day in late summer, Iza goes into labor. Ayla doesn't know what is happening to the woman she has come to call mother, but she takes her cues from the other women, who have collected at Iza's hearth and are waiting patiently.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

Creb has never seen tears before. Tear ducts are another example of Ayla's more evolved state as a human. The fact that Ayla is able to look past Creb's fearsome appearance and feel love for him is another aspect of her evolution. Ayla's emotions, as well as her body and mind, are more evolved than those of her fellow Clansmen.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Iza's baby is a girl. This news is normally a source of sorrow in the Clan, but Iza is happy, and so is Brun. Had the child been a boy, Iza would have had to move to another man's hearth, because Creb couldn't teach a young boy to hunt.

One day, Ayla is out collecting cooking stones for Iza, when she finds a hurt rabbit. Instinctively, she picks it up and brings it back to Iza for healing. Although live animals are not normally allowed in the cave, Iza tends to it. When Creb comes back to his hearth, he sees Iza nursing her baby and Ayla cuddling her rabbit. When Creb questions Iza, she talks to Creb about her idea of training Ayla as a medicine woman. Iza recognizes that Ayla has a healer's instinct. Although Ayla does not share Iza's memories, she would make a good medicine woman. Creb tells her he will think about it.

Iza's seven days of birth confinement pass, and Creb holds a naming ceremony for her daughter. He gives her the name Uba, after their mother. He also conducts a mating ceremony for Oвра and Goov, and Droog and Aga. Goov is Creb's assistant and heir to the magician's title when Creb retires.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

One day, Ayla asks Creb about babies. He explains to her about the man and woman's totems fighting. Her next question is whether she would be able to have a baby, and if so, when. He tries to explain to her that she will have to wait until the seasons pass at least eight or nine times. She doesn't understand, and he tries to explain the basic principles of numbers. Although Creb knows more than any other Clan member, he can only count to twenty, which is a skill he acquired after much practice. He thinks of it as some of his most potent magic, and he is shocked when Ayla grasps the concept quickly and easily, surpassing his understanding within the span of a five-minute lesson.

The mating ceremony is a spiritual and economic ceremony. Sex is as unrestrained as eating or sleeping, and has nothing to do with mating. Any man can have sex with any woman he wishes, with the exception of his sister. Generally, once two people are mated, they have sex exclusively with their mates, but this is not required. It is simply more convenient.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

The Clan makes it through the last long days of winter. One day, Iza pushes baby Uba towards her. Iza is coughing and says crossly that she has no more milk for Uba. Ayla must ask Oga to nurse Uba, because Oga has just had Broud's baby and has plenty of milk. Tomorrow, Iza will teach Ayla to make a formula for babies, so that they don't have to pass Uba around the Clan for milk. Both Iza and Creb think to themselves how much they have aged this winter and are grateful for the arrival of spring.

Uba thrives on her new diet, and Iza's cough subsides, as does Creb's arthritis. Iza is still too weak to roam the countryside for medicinal herbs, and Ayla completely takes over this task. She is happy with her new task. Brun resents how much she enjoys it. He understands that she must find medicinal herbs for Iza, but she is so content to be on her own that it threatens him. Clan women normally prefer to be close to the cave, or with other Clan members. Ayla enjoys her solitary excursions immensely. She often brings back unfamiliar plants, eager to expand her knowledge through Iza's vast, encyclopedic memory.

One day, Iza asks Ayla to replenish her store of cherry bark. Ayla finds the grove where the cherry bark grows, but the men are practicing their sling skills nearby. Ayla doesn't want to disappoint Iza, so she waits to see if the men will leave. She finds herself caught up in Zoug's sling lessons. With her agile mind, she follows the movements and has soon memorized the motions.

Meanwhile, an argument has started among the men. Zoug, the Clan's most experienced sling hunter, is giving Vorn a sling lesson. Broud haughtily comes over and brags that he can teach young Vorn better than Zoug. He takes Zoug's sling and aims at one of the targets. He misses, and Zoug patiently, but triumphantly, tries to continue his lesson with Vorn. Broud is embarrassed and throws the sling away, blaming his miss on the old worn-out sling. He compares it to old Zoug, who, Broud says, can't even hunt anymore. Zoug counters with a snide retort, and Broud shoves the old man.

Brun is outraged. None of the men have ever seen him so angry, and Broud is scared. Although he appears angry to the others, Brun is actually more ashamed of Broud than angry. He also worries about Broud's ability to serve his position of future Clan leader.

The men soon leave, and Ayla creeps from her hiding place, scared and fascinated by what she has witnessed. She moves towards the cherry trees, then sees the sling that Broud threw away. She picks it up. She is nervous, because women are not allowed to touch weapons, but she is sure she has the ability to master the skill. She longs to be able to do something better than Broud, who torments her mercilessly whenever he sees her.



She tries, and tries again. One lucky fluke causes her to hit the post, and she is elated. She realizes that although it was a fluke, her long slender arms give her an advantage with the sling. With a little practice, she will be able to master it. The sun is setting, and she realizes how late it is. She runs back to the cave.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Time passes, and although Ayla learns more about Clan ways and culture, she is still obviously different in many ways. For example, there is a Clan legend about the ice age, when a Clan was divided between those who wanted to stay and wait out the storm, and those who followed a brave young man called Durc, who decided to leave to find a warmer home. When she hears this story, Ayla is always sympathetic to the adventurous young hunter who braves the unknown. The rest of the Clan, on the other hand, tell their children that the moral of the legend is that one should never leave the Clan.

Ayla's difference also manifests itself in Ayla's physical ability and desire to use the sling. In the same way she admires Durc for being different, she recognizes that she is different. She happily finds ways that her differences allow her to succeed, although she succeeds in different ways than those deemed appropriate for Clan women.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Ayla's interest turns into an obsession. She begins to flatter Zoug with attention, attending to his every need, while he is making new slings for the next season. Zoug is grateful for the attention and does not notice Ayla watching him while he makes the slings. Once he is finished, she respectfully asks him for the scraps of leather he has not used and goes into the woods to make her own new sling.

Once Ayla has her new sling, she must find a place to practice. She follows the stream away from the Clan's cave and comes to a grove, where there is a small cave. She is delighted, because she can practice in the grove and hide her sling in her own small cave.

Ayla practices as often as she can., Soon, she is better than Vorn, who began learning from Zoug the same day Ayla began to practice on her own. Although she does not realize it, her skill gives her a confidence that is not lost on Broud. More than ever, he finds excuses to hit her. She is quick to obey his every command, but there is something in her manner that is not subservient.

One day, the situation comes to a head. Broud sees Ayla pausing in her task, lost in thought. He comes up behind her and hits her, causing her to cry out in surprise. A grown woman is forbidden to cry out when she is hit, and Ayla is embarrassed by her outcry. Broud tells her she is lazy and to get him some tea. Against Clan policy and her better judgment, she gives him a long, cold stare as she gets to her feet with an exaggerated slowness. Broud explodes in anger. He beats Ayla unconscious, not even stopping at Brun's command. Brun finally has to drag Broud away. Brun knows that Ayla was insolent to his son, but Broud's uncontrollable temper causes Brun to reconsider his decision to pass his leadership down to Broud.

Brun allows himself three days to analyze his thoughts before speaking to Broud. He begins by telling Broud that he has failed as a father, and Broud understands for the first time just how much his father loves him, as well as how disappointed he is. However, he is not prepared for what follows. Brun declares that if Broud loses control of his temper one more time, he will be disowned. Furthermore, not only will he not become leader, but he'll instead be cursed to death. Broud is astounded by the severity of his father's threats and leaves Brun's hearth with his mind reeling.

Ayla is bedridden for days, but when she has recovered from the beating, she feels that it was almost worth it. Broud now leaves her entirely alone. Once she is used to this new freedom, she is happier than she has ever been. She is insolent to Broud in a thousand silent ways, quietly gloating that she is free from his attacks.



Finally, Iza is out picking plants with Ayla and admonishes her for being so disrespectful. Ayla is contrite. She promises to try harder to be respectful to Broud, but it is resolution she finds hard to keep.

One day, when Ayla is particularly insolent to Broud, he hits her. Brun does not oppose it, and Broud is relieved. Brun has seen Ayla's insolent behavior and understands that Broud must find the balance between commanding the respect of women and controlling his anger.

Ayla complains to Creb that night, but Creb tells her she deserved Broud's fist. Ayla is shocked, especially when Iza admonishes her again for her insolent behavior. Ayla cannot sleep that night, and the next day she goes out to the woods. She feels bad that she has brought shame to Iza and Creb's hearth and cries for the better part of the day. When she comes back, she apologizes to Iza, promising to be different.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Broud is struggling with more than his personal, conscious hatred for Ayla. "At a deep, unconscious level, Broud sensed the opposing destinies of the two. Ayla was more than a threat to his masculinity, she was a threat to his existence. His hatred of her was the hatred of the old for the new, of the traditional for the innovative, of the dying for the living. Broud's race was too static, too unchanging. They had reached the peak of their development, there was no more room to grow. Ayla was part of nature's new experiment, and though she tried to model herself after the women of the Clan, it was only an overlay, a façade only culture deep, assumed for the sake of survival."

Here, the author must be commended on her thorough anthropological research, as well as her ability to weave her scientific knowledge of evolution into the very pulse of the story. The novel is both educational and a good read, with well-developed characters and sub-plots.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

The difference in Ayla is noticeable. Broud thinks he caused it by hitting her, but Iza knows that Ayla fears losing Iza and Creb's love. Broud, emboldened by the change in Ayla, launches an almost constant attack on her. Ayla is unable to step out of Creb's hearth without Broud demanding that she do his bidding, cuffing her all the while. Ayla works hard to maintain her female subservience, but she suffers for it. She stops eating, becomes despondent, and finally sinks into a depression. Seeing that the girl needs to be out by herself, Iza asks Ayla loudly, in front of Broud, to go and find her a certain medicinal herb.

Ayla sets out towards her cave. She finds her sling and begins throwing stones. After all her practice, she is an excellent markswoman. Her thoughts are bitter. She understands that she has a skill and is angry that she is unable to use it to help her Clan. She suddenly thinks that if she hunts only the foxes and hyenas that steal the Clan's meat reserves, she would be able to put her skill to good use and nobody would know. She decides that she will try and runs to the river to find some stones. While looking for stones, she finds a fossil and decides that her totem telling her she's made a good decision. She puts the fossil into her amulet. She comes to the conclusion that her totem has sent her Broud as a test, and if she can control herself around Broud all winter, then her totem will allow her to hunt the following spring.

Her test is a difficult one. Broud is relentless in his bullying, and in winter Ayla cannot escape the confines of the cave. Some days are almost unbearable, but she clings to the thought of teaching herself to be a true hunter in the spring. Iza's medical lessons also make the long winter easier to bear. Iza knows she is getting old and has limited time to transmit her knowledge to Ayla. Ayla is fascinated by everything she learns and retains the knowledge easily. She even assists Iza in extracting a rotten tooth from Creb's mouth, and the other Clan members are impressed by Ayla's skill. She begins to treat basic ailments, and she even treats Brun for a burn while Iza is attending a childbirth. As a result, Brun feels less uneasy around Ayla.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Throughout the last two chapters, Ayla has undergone a series of personal changes. She is insolent to Broud, and after his severe beating she's even more so. She is reprimanded by Creb, and determines that she will be better. She keeps her promise, aided by her decision to see Broud as a test. If she passes the test, she will be worthy to hunt in the spring.. Finally, because of her docile behavior towards Broud, he becomes calmer in his beatings of her, and an uneasy truce settles between the two.





# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

As spring comes, Ayla begins training herself to hunt. She learns to track animals and move stealthily. She sometimes follows the men, unobserved. One day, a wolverine enters the cave and steals someone's meat. Ayla sees her chance and goes after the ugly creature. Once she is out of sight of the cave, she kills it in one shot. She has the same elation over her small wolverine that Broud had killing his first bison. The thrill of the hunt has infected Ayla.

She becomes more adept than any of the other hunters with the sling, and many carnivorous predators fall victim to her quick arm. One day, she spies a lynx. She remembers Zoug telling Vorn that a lynx could be killed with a sling, and she tries. The lynx moves, and the stone barely grazes him. He turns on Ayla, and although she is able to fend him off, she comes back to camp that night badly shaken.

For a while after the attack, Ayla is afraid to go out alone. Soon, her natural restlessness forces her out of the cave once more. She is pondering what happened when she stumbles upon the answer. If only she had two stones instead of one, then the second one could hit the mark, even if the first stone missed. She is soon as accurate with two stones as she is with one. One day, she even kills a hyena, and is elated at her progress.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

As Ayla hones her skills, her character again undergoes a change. Although she is still completely subservient to Broud, there is a hunter's graceful assurance about her. To Broud it seems that, although she is quick to do his bidding, she is condescending to obey him. He watches her every move, looking carefully for any excuse to punish her, and is frustrated by her perfect obedience. There is something in the combination of her obedience and confident composure that makes Broud feel inferior to her. After a while, he begins to leave her alone, disliking his encounters with her more and more, as he feels less and less able to affect her in any way.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

Winter comes again, and Iza spends the majority of the season teaching Ayla new healing methods. Winter passes quickly for Ayla, and spring approaches. Brun announces that the Clan will take a trip to the ocean to hunt the massive beluga sturgeon that mate close into shore.

Everyone is excited. After they have set up camp, Ayla dives into the ocean. Her love of swimming is just one of her many differences from Clan members, whose heavy bones make swimming nearly impossible.

The following morning, the Clan begins the sturgeon hunt. They set out nets, and prepare to wait for the sturgeon's movement towards the shore. Sturgeon are spotted, and as they come nearer, the Clan's excitement builds. Just as they are closing in, Ayla hears Uba cry out. She follows Uba's gaze out to sea, and sees the young girl Ona disappearing into the salty depths. Without hesitation, Ayla dives in, swimming rapidly. She knows that if Ona goes much further, she will be sucked in by the strong undertow.

Ayla swims harder than she has ever swum before, and finally reaches the young girl, just as she is about to be sucked under. Ona is unconscious, and Ayla now begins the arduous process of fighting the current with Ona's dead weight dragging her down. When she reaches shore, Ayla sees that the entire Clan is watching her. Iza revives the unconscious child, and Aga and Droog are ecstatic, relieved that their child was not lost. Because of their inability to swim, many Clan members have been lost at sea, and the fact that Ona has been saved by Ayla is nothing short of a miracle.

A huge amount of sturgeon is caught that day, and Ayla receives the honor of being granted the first handful of fish eggs. She will remember the acceptance she feels for long into the future.

Towards the end of the sturgeon run, there is less to do, and Ayla spends her afternoons watching Droog make tools. He is the expert craftsman of the Clan and is taking advantage of his time by the sea to find the materials only found in this area.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

Chapter 13 is Ayla's chapter to shine. For the first time, her oddities, like swimming, are seen to have some benefit to the Clan. For a short time, Ayla is a hero in the eyes of the Clan. She is accepted, and basks in that feeling that other Clan members can take for granted.



Droog especially honors Ayla, by telling her that Brun has decided the hunters will go on a mammoth hunt. He hints that Ayla may be among the women chosen to go with the men. He also gives her a gift of some tools he has made.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

The mammoth hunt is formally announced to the Clan. Everyone is excited and a little nervous, as well. A mammoth hunt is risky, as every able-bodied person is unable to fulfill their normal hunting and gathering activities for at least one month, with no guarantee that a mammoth will be killed. This can lead to a shortage of food during the winter months, but Brun decides to take the risk. In two years, there will be a Clan Gathering, which makes it necessary to stockpile provisions. If successful, a mammoth hunt would make that much easier.

It is decided that Ayla will go with the Clan on the mammoth hunt, and she is ecstatic. The day before they leave, Iza, who is too old to go on the mammoth hunt, gives Ayla her own medicine bag. Ayla understands the significance of this. She is on her way to becoming a full-fledged medicine woman.

The hunt is successful. The brave hunters, using intelligence, cooperation and teamwork, kill a mammoth. The men's work is over, and now the women fall to the task of preparing the meat for the journey home.

As the women are hard at work over the mammoth meat, Broud's son Brac wanders away from the camp. Before anyone notices his absence, they hear his screams. He is being dragged away by a hyena. Broud cries out in despair and tries to hit the animal with stones from his sling. The animal is quick, and Broud's skill with the sling is not good. Suddenly, two stones whiz past Broud, and the hyena is dead. Ayla runs past the stunned Clan towards the child. She does not realize the implications of her actions, until she has scooped up the small child and brings him back to camp to tend to his mangled arm. The Clan members stare at her, and she suddenly realizes that her secret is known.

Unable to think what this implies, she forces herself to think only of the child. For the first time, Broud is grateful to Ayla. He thinks only of how relieved he is. Brun's mind, however, is reeling. He is now faced with what may be the most difficult decision he will ever have to make. He knows that a woman's hunting is punishable by death, but he also knows that this woman has just saved his beloved grandson. He is overwhelmed with emotion and decides to postpone making this weighty decision, until he has consulted the Mog-ur.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

Ayla's action tests the Clan's ability to adapt to change. Will Brun be able to overcome hundreds of years of unchanging Clan tradition? Will his inability to accept change force him to lose one of his Clan's most valuable members?



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

When the Clan returns from the hunt, those who were left at the cave know something is wrong immediately. The story of Ayla's heroic treachery unfolds, and everyone is mystified. Iza is worried. Creb is angry. He and Brun walk in the woods together to discuss the situation. Creb feels betrayed by his own emotions, knowing that his love for the girl has blinded him to signs that he should have detected before.

The following day, the Clan members meet to question Ayla. She reveals everything to them, including the first day Ayla tried to hunt, when she saw Brun reprimand Broud for hitting Zoug. Broud pales in shame to know that Ayla witnessed that. He realizes that, once again, Ayla has bested him. She even saved his own child when he was unable to do so. After seeing her hunting skills in action, Brun realizes that Ayla could be a valuable asset to the Clan. Her breach of propriety is much more severe than he had originally thought, though, because she has been honing her hunting skills for a long time. Creb decides to meditate on it, and Brun invites the whole Clan to ponder the situation for the day. All agree to meet tomorrow to come to a decision.

The following day, they come together. Each man votes as to whether Ayla should be condemned to death, and the votes come to a tie. Brun must make the final decision himself.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

Creb's meditations have brought him memory of a time when women did hunt. Because it was the female who gave birth, it was her responsibility to feed her offspring. The Clan ponders the thought that perhaps Ayla's totem is not the cave lion, but the cave lioness. In the cave lion family, it is the female that hunts, not the male. Many of the Clan members think this makes sense and say that it would account for Ayla's strong hunting instincts.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

After meditating all night, Brun decides that, while he must impose the death sentence on Ayla, there are no Clan rules that determine the length of the death sentence. Therefore, when he sentences her to death, Brun adds that she is sentenced to death for one moon, or a month. If Ayla survives her death sentence, she will be allowed to return once again to the Clan.

After she hears her sentence and realizes that her Clansmen are not acknowledging her existence, Ayla runs blindly in her grief. She finds herself at her own little cave. She ponders what it means to be dead, and marvels that she does not feel dead. She simply feels cold and hungry. Ayla is a survivor, and she instinctively begins to do what she must to stay alive. She cuts a piece of her fur wrap and uses it to make herself a sling. For the first time, she hunts animals for food. Then she brings her catch back to the cave, along with flint and kindling to make a fire.

Ayla's next few days are busy. She knows that soon the snow will come, and she needs a large supply of food and firewood, if she is to survive. When the snow comes, she is well prepared to survive, but not for the loneliness she experiences, alone in her cave.

Ayla keeps track of the days the way she's learned by watching Creb. When one moon has passed, Ayla can't leave her cave, because there is a blizzard. One night she wakes, and the blizzard has ended. She is overjoyed and begins to burrow out of her cave, which is by now covered with snow.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

For the Clan, death is simply a state where a person is no longer seen or acknowledged by Clan members. They are so dependent upon each other for their survival that, when they become unwelcome in the cave, it is as if they are already dead, despite their actual physical state.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

Ayla is back, and everyone is overjoyed. Brun and Creb are planning a ceremony, although none of the other Clan members know what kind of ceremony. They all try to show Ayla that they are happy she has returned.

The following day, Ayla is brought to the ceremonial cave. For the first time in Clan history, a woman is allowed to partake in a ceremony. Ayla is surprised. Creb invokes the ancient spirits that guarded female hunters before females became unable to hunt. Then, incredibly, Brun grants her the status of "Woman who Hunts," explaining that her totem ordained it by protecting her during her death curse. She is allowed to hunt with the sling only, but is officially a hunter.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

All the hunters seem satisfied with the ceremony, except Broud. He hates Ayla more than ever, and hates Brun for the favoritism he shows the girl. Since she has come back, Ayla has an otherworldly confidence, a peace with the world that Broud cannot shake. She is no longer insolent, nor condescending. She is simply out of his reach. He is desperate for some way to shake her unbending spirit and will soon find one.



# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

As Ayla begins her tenth year, her body becomes that of a woman. Her shape changes, and she begins to menstruate. She also begins to hunt. The first time she brings home two rabbits she's killed, the whole Clan stares in shock. They soon get over their discomfort, however, because Ayla's prolific hunting lessens the burden of hunting for the entire Clan.

Ayla begins to hunt regularly, once again enjoying her time away from the cave. One day, when she is out hunting, Broud finds her. Her sublime happiness irritates him to no end, but he can think of no reason to make her do anything for him. Suddenly, he realizes that there is something. She is a woman now, so he makes a motion for Ayla to lie down and assume the position that will enable him to relieve his sexual needs with her. He is within his rights to ask this of her, according to tradition, but something in Ayla rebels against this. She tries to struggle away, and he beats her senseless. As she lies bleeding and only semi-conscious, Broud relieves his need with her. It is excruciating to Ayla, and Broud is satisfied. He has finally found a way to break down her impenetrable calm. He rapes her up to three times a day, and Ayla once again falls into a deep depression.

Iza watches the change in her daughter with concern. Suddenly, something dawns on her. She asks Ayla how long it has been since she menstruated. Ayla tries to remember, and Iza quickly asks if she has been sick in the mornings. She replies affirmatively, and Iza announces to Ayla that her totem has been defeated, and she is with child.

Ayla is overjoyed. She and the rest of the Clan had believed that her totem was too strong to be overcome, and that she would never have a baby of her own. Iza advises her to take something to make her lose the baby, since Ayla has no mate, but Ayla is stubborn. She has wanted a baby of her own ever since Uba was born, and she refuses to take Iza's advice.

Iza concedes, and Ayla is once again the happy, vibrant girl that brings life to Creb and Iza's hearth. Suddenly, all she can think of is her new baby. Her sexual encounters with Broud become little more than a nuisance to her. He immediately loses interest, since his only attraction to sex with her was that it used to affect her so deeply.

## Chapter 18 Analysis

Sex in the Clan is seen in a very different way than modern sex. It is as natural as relieving one's thirst or hunger. It has nothing to do with being mates, other than it is generally more convenient to relieve that need with a mate, as a man spends more time around his mate than other women. There is not even any correlation between sex and



conception, in the Clan's understanding. It occurs to nobody that Ayla got pregnant as soon as Broud began having sex with her.



# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

The entire Clan is dumbfounded, when everyone learns about Ayla's pregnancy. They had all believed her totem too strong to be overcome. Some theorize that perhaps all of the men's totems have come together to defeat hers. Proximity also has something to do with whose baby a woman has, in Clan beliefs, so some believe that it is Creb's baby. It would make sense, because he is the only man whose totem is stronger than Ayla's. Some recognize that Broud has been spending a lot of time around Ayla recently, and that it perhaps was his totem that defeated hers.

Ayla's pregnancy is a difficult one, and Iza is concerned that Ayla's determination to have a baby may kill her. One day, Iza goes out in the rain to find a particular medication that will help Ayla keep her baby. She comes back with a hacking cough, and Ayla realizes how sick Iza is. She begins to nurse her mother back to health, using the formidable knowledge that she has learned from Iza.

Ayla goes into labor and has an extremely difficult birth. When the baby comes out, Iza pronounces him deformed. He has all his limbs, but his head is a different shape from that of the Clan. His neck is too thin, unable to support the large head.

According to Clan tradition, a woman is not allowed to keep a deformed child. She must take him far from the cave and leave him. Ayla, with her characteristic stubbornness, refuses. She reminds Iza of a Clan legend about a child who survived for seven days after the Clan abandoned him. In the legend, that child was accepted, just as Ayla was accepted when she returned from her death sentence. Bleeding and weak, Ayla carries her baby away, without a word to anyone. She heads toward the small cave that has protected her in the past. The Clan thinks she has gone to bury her deformed child, but Uba, unbeknownst to Ayla, follows mother and child into the hills and watches her crawl into the small cave.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

The author describes the baby's "deformities" as such: "His head was definitely unnatural. It was abnormally large, the cause of Ayla's difficult delivery...and the thin, scrawny neck that was unable to support the baby's huge head. Ayla's baby had heavy brow ridges, like people of the Clan, but his forehead, rather than sloping back, rose high and straight above the brows, bulging, to Iza's eyes, into a high crown before it swept back in a long, full shape. But, the back of his head was not quite as long as it should have been. It looked as though the baby's skull was pushing forward into the bulging forehead and crown, shortening forward into a bulging forehead and crown, shortening and rounding the back."

What Auel describes is a combination between the bone structures of Ayla and Broud.



# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary

When Ayla doesn't come home that night, Iza is forced to tell Creb of Ayla's wanting to keep the child alive for seven days, so that Brun would be forced to accept the child into the Clan. Creb is furious, as is Brun when he is told. He orders the men to go on a search for Ayla and her child. This time, her willful disobedience cannot be forgiven.

Meanwhile, in her cave, Ayla struggles to regain her strength after her difficult childbirth. Uba comes to tell her that Brun has made up his mind to find her, and curse her to death. Uba leaves, and Ayla realizes how desperate her situation is.

Ayla decides that she will go back to the cave. If Brun curses her baby, then she'll beg him to curse her as well, so that she and her baby can join the spirit world together.

## Chapter 20 Analysis

During the long hours that Ayla spends trying to regain her strength and feed her baby, she thinks about how babies are created. She comes to the conclusion that Broud had something to do with her pregnancy. Ayla's ability to come to this conclusion by herself is just one example of her evolved state, compared to her Clansmen.



# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

Ayla returns to the cave, goes directly to Brun, and throws herself at his feet. She asks permission to speak, and it is granted. She apologizes to Brun for defying him and tells him that if he wishes her baby to have the death curse, then she will respect his wishes. She asks only that, if he does, he curse her as well.

Brun is astonished and relieved at her return. If she had stayed away for the full seven days, it would have been an open attack on his leadership. Now that she has returned before the seven days were up, she has actually done nothing to defy him.

Brun puts the question to the other Clan members. They agree with Broud, that the woman and child should receive the death curse. Then Mog-ur speaks. He says that a child views her father as a role model. He, as Ayla's father, is deformed, which makes it only natural that Ayla should be blinded to any deformity her son would have.

Brun makes his decision. Ayla will be cursed, but only to the woman's curse of seven days. The child is named Durc. Because Ayla has no mate, Brun takes the responsibility of training the boy to hunt upon himself.

## Chapter 21 Analysis

For the first time, the reader understands just how deep Creb's feelings for Ayla are. He is a great magician, but he is also a man. Ayla is the only one of the Clan who does not see Creb as a cripple or a magician. Ayla sees Creb simply as a man she loves, the first person, says Creb, who has ever seen him as a whole person. His argument is convincing to all but Broud, whose hatred for Ayla grows even more intense.



# Chapter 22

## Chapter 22 Summary

Durc's neck quickly becomes stronger, and soon he is able to hold his head up by himself. He is given the totem of Grey Wolf, and Ayla is made a full medicine woman. The Clan prepares to go to the Clan Gathering. Iza is too old to go, so Ayla will make the sacred drink in her place, if the other Clan members agree to this.

The Clan begins its long journey towards the Clan Gathering. On their way, they see a cave bear. It is Ayla's first cave bear sighting, but many of the others have seen a cave bear. It is the hosting Clan's responsibility to raise a cave bear cub to be tame, so that it can participate in the ceremonies during the Gathering.

Despite Creb's warnings, Ayla is not ready for the sensation she causes among the two hundred other Clan members that are at the gathering when they arrive. Despite Clan etiquette, they cannot help but stare at Ayla.

Norg, the leader of the host Clan, approaches Brun immediately, questioning why he has brought one of the others to the Clan gathering. Brun replies that Ayla is a member of the Clan, and a medicine woman of Iza's line. Mog-ur confirms these facts with a penetrating look at Norg.

Ayla's Clan is finally allowed into the cave, after this stand-off. Ayla is reluctant to go back out, due to the pointed stares and animosity she feels. Uba wants to see the cave bear, though, and finally convinces Ayla to leave the cave with her.

Ayla once again demonstrates her difference from the rest of the Clan by having no fear of the cave bear. Rather than leave her ceremonial gifts of food on the ground for the bear, she goes right up to the fence, scratches the fat bear's ears and feeds him directly from her hand. The Clans look on in astonishment. Women are normally terrified of the enormous animal, but Ayla has always had a way with animals. She actually feels more comfortable around the bear than under the collective stare of the Clan members.

As Ayla and Uba watch the events going on around them, a woman from another Clan comes up and shyly introduces herself as Oda. She shows her baby to Ayla, and Ayla is astonished. Although younger, the baby is a female version of Durc! Oda reveals why she has come over. Knowing that Durc has a similar "deformity" to her daughter, she broaches the subject of the two children mating when they reach adulthood. Ayla agrees happily, but her mind is racing. With her sharp intelligence, she traces the chain of events that Oda describes, as well as the chain of events leading up to Durc's conception. She realizes that her instincts have been right, and it was Broud relieving his needs with her that created Durc.



## Chapter 22 Analysis

There is no supreme leader of the Clans, but there is a hierarchy. This hierarchy is reaffirmed during each Clan gathering, through various competitions. Brun's Clan is the current top-ranking Clan, partially due to his excellent hunters, and partially due to Iza and Creb's status as medicine woman and Mog-ur.



# Chapter 23

## Chapter 23 Summary

Bringing Ayla to the Clan Gathering is more of a risk to the Clan's status than Brun has realized. Ayla's own Clan has grown to accept her strange looks over the years, but it is too much to accept so quickly for the other Clans. The other magicians have even told Mog-ur that they would prefer to forego the special ceremonial drink, rather than have it made by one of the Others. For this reason, it is more important than ever that Brun's Clan comes first in all competitions. Otherwise, the Cave Bear Clan is in danger of losing its first place status.

Brun is beaten in the bola race, which hurts the Clan's standing. However, Broud wins the running spear race, bringing their prestige back up.

The next event of the gathering is the Bear Ceremony. For a full day, the pampered bear has been deprived food and water, and he's cranky. The three best hunters of the Clans, Broud, Voord, and Gorn, have been chosen for the ceremony. The three hunters climb the trees in the bear's cage and open the door, freeing the angry bear. From the trees, the three of them jump onto the back, shoulder, and head of the massive animal. Voord is immediately killed, when the bear snaps his spine in a great bear hug.

The two remaining hunters cling to the bear's back, and the great animal moves into the crowd. The second tier of hunters are there with their spears, but the bear swipes at them with an angry paw, ripping one man's leg wide open. He screams, and Ayla reacts instinctively. Shoving Durc at Uba, she races to the bleeding man. She carries him clear of the bear and the thronging crowd, and begins to apply a tourniquet to his leg, saving him from bleeding to death almost instantly.

She is so intensely involved in her work, she is unaware when the bear is finally killed, and her personal safety is secured.

## Chapter 23 Analysis

Once again, with no mind for her own safety, Ayla instinctively shows her bravery by putting herself in harm's way to save a life. This makes the entire Clan see that, although she is of the Others, she is truly a medicine woman of Iza's line. This instinct is not something that can be taught, but must be passed on through the generations. Iza has told her many times that, although she is not a blood relation to Iza, Ayla must have been a medicine woman in her own Clan. Though she does not share the memories, she does share Iza's healing instincts.



# Chapter 24

## Chapter 24 Summary

Due to Ayla's heroic act of bravery in the face of the cave bear, the Mog-urs decide that she should prepare the ritual drink, after all. There is little time, and Ayla hurriedly tries to make everything ready. Meanwhile, the other women are busy making the ceremonial feast.

When the meal is served, Ayla is too nervous to eat any of the delicious food. Soon, the feast is finished, and the ceremony starts. Ayla waits, holding Iza's sacred bowl, to be given the signal. Creb taps her on the shoulder, and she enters the circle of light surrounded by the men. She is naked, covered only by her crown of golden hair. The Mog-urs gasp at how different the shape of her body is from Clan women, but accept the drink she has made.

Then it is over, and Ayla is back with the other women, dancing. She drinks an herbal drink, and time loses all meaning. She knows nothing but the beating of the drum and the gyrating dances. Suddenly, she remembers Iza's bowl. It has been passed down through the generations, and she knows she cannot lose it. Disoriented, but obsessed with finding the bowl, Ayla goes back to the cave where she served the drink. She finds the bowl, and there is still some of the sacred drink in it.

Ayla realizes that she has made too much of the drink. In her confused state, she feels that she has committed a grave error that would bring much shame on Creb and Brun. The sacred drink cannot be thrown away, and Ayla doesn't know what to do with it. She finally decides to drink it herself, although this is strictly forbidden, but she can think of no other way to dispose of the milky liquid.

Ayla tries to exit the dark chamber, but stumbles upon the Mog-urs, who are in a deep ritualistic trance. The liquid she has drunk accentuates the Clan's memory abilities, and part of the ritual is that Creb, as *the* Mog-ur, will lead the Mog-urs collectively back to the ancient beginnings of mankind. Only the Mog-urs of Creb's line have this unique ability. Suddenly, Ayla senses the Mog-ur in her head. He is angry at her for being there, and trying to keep the other Mog-urs' minds from seeking out hers. This is not a ceremony that any woman has ever seen, nor been involved in, and it is said that nothing will arouse the spirits' wrath more than this. Still, Creb is also curious. He wants to know something of Ayla's beginnings. He travels back with her mind.

## Chapter 24 Analysis

When Creb and Ayla make the journey of memories together, they find that they are from the same basic origin, diverging in details only. As they begin to return to the present, they separate. Suddenly, Ayla is sucked for an instant into the future. Although Creb sees where she has gone, he cannot go with her, due to his inferior mind power.



All he sees is that his race will die out, stamped out by the Others. Ayla sees this, too, and they are both gripped with a terrible sadness.



# Chapter 25

## Chapter 25 Summary

After the night of the ceremony, the gathering is over. Brun's Clan makes their preparations to depart. On the day of their departure, Broud makes his rounds to the other Clans, saying his farewells to the other men. He is angered by the fact that Ayla has once again stolen his show, because hers is the name on everyone's lips, not his.

When they return to the cave, Ayla finds Iza much sicker than when she'd left. She throws herself wholeheartedly into the task of trying to cure Iza, trying every remedy she knows, not leaving Iza's side for a moment. However, soon after, Iza walks with the spirits. Before she dies, she draws Ayla close to her. She tells Ayla that when Broud is leader, Ayla must leave the Clan to seek out her own people, the Others. These are Iza's last words, as she exhales her last breath.

## Chapter 25 Analysis

On the journey back to the cave, the pace is slower. Brun notices that there has developed a rift between Creb and Ayla, but Creb is not angry at Ayla. He is saddened at what he has seen. Their paths will veer from each other, both as individuals, and as species, with Creb's species coming out the loser.



# Chapter 26

## Chapter 26 Summary

The entire Clan mourns Iza's death, but no one more than Ayla. Not only does she mourn her loss, but also she feels responsible, having left Iza to go to the Clan Gathering, when she knew how sick Iza was. She is senseless in her grief, unable to hear even her own son's hungry cries, and Creb takes the squalling baby to other women to nurse, time and again.

After the burial rites for Iza, Ayla runs senseless into the woods. When Brun finds her later that night, she is unconscious from fever, and has lost her milk.

Since Ayla is unable to feed her baby, Durc must go to someone else's hearth. Oga is the only woman with milk, but Broud refuses the young boy. Oga is no longer a young girl, and she's still grateful to Ayla for saving her son's life. She defies her mate for the first time. It is a woman's right to nurse, and although Broud can refuse to have Durc living at his hearth, Oga defiantly claims her right to nurse Durc. Broud is furious, and his fury only fuels Brun's doubts at his ability to lead the Clan.

Broud stalks off, making himself a final promise. Never again will he give the leader cause to doubt his leadership abilities. When Broud does become leader, he determines, he will make Ayla pay for all of the humiliation he has suffered because of her.

Creb is more despondent over Ayla than he is over his loss of Iza. He blames himself that he did not force Ayla to feed Durc and feels responsible for the loss of her milk. Ayla does not blame Creb, but she has lost an important part of her son's childhood, and to avoid seeing him nurse from other women, she begins to hunt again.

One day, while Creb is minding the young boy, he hears Durc laugh, a sound he has only heard come from Ayla. He begins to study the boy, and begins to reach the same conclusion as Ayla did. Durc is not deformed, Creb realizes. He is simply a mixture of her and the Clan.

## Chapter 26 Analysis

Unlike Ayla, Creb's mind is not agile enough to put together what it means that the boy is physically a mixture of Ayla and the Clan. The sequence of events that so easily told Ayla how babies were made is still lost on Creb, despite his being the most intelligent of all the Clan members. He simply does not have the mental capacity to make the same assessments that Ayla does.



# Chapter 27

## Chapter 27 Summary

Time passes, and Uba becomes a woman. After her period of isolation during her woman's curse, she is mated to Vorn, as is Borg to Ona. Ayla begins to take Durc with her when she goes hunting. She loves to play with her baby and hear the sounds that she used to make, before she learned it was against Clan ways. One day she begins to ponder Iza's warning that she must leave the Clan to find the Others, before Broud becomes leader. She quickly pushes the thought out of her mind, but now that she has remembered it, she can't quite forget.

Ayla is restless. She focuses her intense energy on Creb, who is getting old, as is Brun. One day, Brun lets the other men go out hunting by themselves, and Ayla realizes with a shock just how much Brun has changed.

## Chapter 27 Analysis

The cycle of life turns again, and with the adulthood of the younger members of the Clan, comes the entrance to old age for Brun and Creb. This means not only a change for them, but also a change for Ayla. She knows that when Creb dies, she will not have a hearth of her own. Her thoughts of the Others grow stronger.



# Chapter 28

## Chapter 28 Summary

On the night before Creb hands over the title of Mog-ur to Goov, and Broud's becomes leader, Creb finally realizes the implication of Durc's being half Ayla and half Clan. Although the Clan is destined to die out, Ayla's son will be the link between the two species, so the Clan will not die out completely.

The day after Broud becomes leader, he calls a Clan meeting. He announces that Ayla will become his second woman. Although Ayla is not happy, she is not surprised. Broud's next words, however, come as a shock to everyone. Broud announces that he will not have a deformed child at his hearth, and Durc is to live at Vorn's hearth.

The Clan is aghast. It is unprecedented for a woman to be separated unnecessarily from her child. It is obvious to everyone that Broud's intentions are to hurt Ayla. Broud has not finished. Now that Creb is no longer Mog-ur, Broud announces that Creb's hearth space, protected from the elements because of Creb's arthritis, will become Goov's. Ayla can be still no longer. She is no longer a Clan woman, but a medicine woman protecting her patient. She tells Broud that a move to a different and draughtier position in the cave would mean certain death for Creb, and accuses the new leader of making the decision just to hurt Ayla.

Brun is also livid and recognizes he has been mistaken to believe that Broud could be a suitable leader. He has been blind to just how unsuitable his son is. Broud's first decisions as leader are shameful acts of vengeance against a woman he has long hated. There is more to come. The earth begins to tremble in an earthquake. Creb, who went back into the cave in disgust, is killed instantly by a falling rock. Everyone else is unharmed, but they are badly shaken. Broud rashly points at Ayla, saying that she has made the spirits angry. Broud orders Goov to place the death curse on her, and the bewildered Clan looks on, as Goov obeys the new Clan leader.

Suddenly, it is done. Ayla has been given the death curse, and the Clan is no longer able to recognize her. She must leave the Clan and Durc. She runs to Brun and drops to the ground at his feet. She acknowledges that he cannot see her, but begs him to take care of her son and protect him from Broud's hatred. She receives the slightest glimmer of recognition from Brun's wise eyes, and, satisfied, she packs her belongings and goes.

## Chapter 28 Analysis

Ayla has accepted her fate. Only after she was accepted as one of the Clan through her triumphs at the Gathering, did she recognize that she is not Clan. She is of the Others, and her destiny lies with them. She sets out to follow Iza's advice and find her people.



# Characters

## Ayla

*The Clan of the Cave Bear* chronicles the early life of Ayla. As a young Cro-Magnon girl, Ayla's parents are killed in an earthquake at the beginning of the novel when she was just five years of age. She is rescued by Iza, the Clan's medicine woman, and she is brought into the Clan. However, Ayla is uncomfortable with the rules and customs of her adopted people and she makes a series of costly mistakes that eventually lead to her exile.

Ayla is adopted by The Clan and trained by Iza to be a medicine woman. This is difficult for Ayla, but she has a quick mind and a natural curiosity. She teaches herself to hunt with a sling (hunting is forbidden to Clan women) and only hunts predators since she could not bring her kills back to the cave. When she saves the life of Broud's child on the mammoth hunt, she is cursed with death for a month. Ayla survives this exile and earns the respect of The Clan. Her return confirms to Iza, Creb, and Brun that she is protected by her Cave Lion totem and is lucky for the Clan. However, her accomplishment only increases Broud's irrational hatred for her. At the end, Ayla is exiled from the Clan, but she leaves in peace because she knows that she doesn't belong there.

## Broud

Broud is the son of Brun's mate, Ebe, and is therefore destined to become the next leader of The Clan. He is also shallow, vain, egotistical, impatient, and illogical. Yet he is a brilliant dancer, a fearless hunter, and a great storyteller. His resentment of Ayla begins early on, and grows stronger as they grow up; he resents her strength, resourcefulness, and the fact that she does not respect him. His obsessive anger toward Ayla is the driving force of the novel; he progresses from verbal abuse to physical beatings and finally to sexual assault. It is only when Ayla discovers that she is pregnant and no longer cares if Broud "relieves his needs" that his daily rapings of her stop.

After he becomes leader he is even more tyrannical with Ayla. Since she has no mate, Broud agrees to take her as his second mate, but will not allow her to keep her son. He also insists that Creb leave his comfortable place in the cave to a colder, more exposed area. Ayla attacks him and he curses her with death. At that moment, an earthquake destroys the cave and The Clan must wander once more.

## Brun

Brun is the leader of The Clan. He is a very traditional ruler and does not like to upset the old ways. However, he is very concerned about doing whatever is necessary to help



his people survive. His only blind spot is for Broud. He knows that Broud is a vain, selfish boy—but Brun cannot bring himself to break the tradition of giving power to the son of his mate. However, he does realize the mistake he has made after Broud has sentenced Ayla to permanent death. By the end of the novel Brun is the only "old" one left.

## Creb

Creb (also known as The Mog-Ur) is a great holy man and a respected member of the Clan. He is the brother of Brun and Iza. Born deformed, Creb was later horribly scarred in an attack by a cave bear. This attack cost him his right eye and heightened his ability to speak to and interpret the sayings of the "spirits": the supernatural entities that The Clan believed surrounded them. Creb's birth defect prevented him from hunting, and so kept him from being a real man in the eyes of his people. He agrees to train Ayla as a good Clan woman once his sister, Iza, has adopted her. He also finds Ayla intriguing because she does not look at him in fear and disgust, but trust and love. Creb feels deeply wounded whenever Ayla is unable or unwilling to conform to the Clan ways.

Creb is not just the holy man of his particular group; he is The Mog-ur, the holiest and most powerful holy man among all the clans of his species. He believes that his species has reached the height of their evolution and will soon die out. He realizes that Ayla's half-breed son, Durc, will be the salvation of his people and their kind. Creb also shows touching devotion to Iza and finally dies during the second earthquake on top of her grave.

## Durc

Durc is Ayla's son. Born when his mother was only eleven years of age, he is half Neanderthal and half Cro-Magnon. The Clan decides that he is deformed and must die, but Ayla forces the Clan to accept him by hiding for seven days. Creb realizes that Durc is the future of the Clan people and during Iza's final illness, he becomes the child of the entire Clan.

## Iza

*Iza* is Ayla's adopted mother and the sister of both Creb and Brun. She is also the greatest medicine woman of the entire species, her status being handed down in an unbroken chain from mother to daughter for countless generations. It is Iza who discovers a starved, scared, half-dead, five year-old Ayla and nurses her back to health. She also decides to train Ayla as a medicine woman. After the earthquake that kills her mate, Iza sets up a hearth with her brother, Creb, and raises Ayla and her biological daughter, Uba, as sisters. Her final illness and death devastate Ayla.

## **The Mog-ur**

See Creb

## **Uba**

Uba is Iza's biological daughter and Ayla's adopted sister. She and Ayla are devoted to each other and she silently agrees to raise Durc when Ayla is cursed with death at the end of the novel.





# Themes

## Nature versus Nurture

One of the most prevalent themes in *The Clan of the Cave Bear* is the idea of "nature versus nurture"; in other words, is the way one behaves more controlled by genetics or environment? Auel insists that The Clan survives only by following the traditional rules and gender roles to the point where they have become incapable of change and cannot adapt to new situations. For example, Clan women do not hunt simply because women do not hunt: they do not *want* to hunt. She also describes the Clan woman as naturally submissive and physically unable to learn new things.

Ayla's presence forces the Clan to question their society and their traditions. Ayla seems driven to rebel against the Clan's traditions because she cannot logically understand them. Although she behaves as a model Clan woman, there is a bounce to her step and a refusal to bend her will to the patriarchal culture. Although the Clan punishes her for her transgressions, other Clan women see that a female *can* hunt, heal, and can stand up to abuse and exploitation. Therefore, because she represents such a danger to the patriarchal Clan structure, she is exiled at the end of the novel.

## Individual and Society

Ayla's inability to assimilate into Clan society exposes another of Auel's themes: what happens to the wants and desires of the individual when those wants and desires clash with the needs of the individual's society? Ayla wants love from Creb and Iza and acceptance from the Clan, yet her individual needs to be free, to think, to experience life, and to wander alone are incompatible with the Clan's need to control all of its members for the good of the community. Ayla is beaten, raped, and cursed because she puts her own feelings and the needs of the individuals in her life above the needs of the community for order and harmony.

Auel is directly criticizing contemporary American society which, on the one hand, champions the rights of the individual and yet culturally teaches citizens to be obedient and law-abiding. This conflict between the individual and societal needs is clearly defined by the character of Broud. Broud is driven by revenge and does not think about the good of his community or the individuals that make up that community. In the end, he drives out a gifted medicine woman and brings down the retribution of the spirits who destroy the cave, killing Creb and forcing Broud's people to become wanderers again.

## Cultural Stagnation Equals Extinction

Arguably the most problematic part of Auel's novel is her creation of Neanderthal culture. Most anthropologists would argue that Auel's science is weak and inaccurate. There is no scientific evidence that the Neanderthal were bowlegged, that they did not



have a full range of motion in their arms, or that they could not speak, cry, or laugh. These are all ideas that Auel created out of thin air. She then uses these reasons to explain why the Neanderthal died out. She suggests that cultural stagnation—the inability of a people to change and adapt—leads to extinction. Auel's narrator insists that the Clan cannot learn anything new because their brains would then have to get bigger, making childbirth more dangerous. She also suggests that because the Clan people cannot share domestic tasks or develop new inventions or new ways of hunting their society will die.

This is Auel's perception of American culture in the mid-1970s. Failed economic plans, social agendas, and cultural ideology that refused to change had led the country into double-digit inflation and record high unemployment. Using the Clan as a metaphor, Auel is maintaining that American society must be flexible and welcome new influences in order to survive and prosper in the future.

## Problems with Patriarchy

For many readers, the strict gender roles of the Clan are puzzling and offensive. Writing at the height of the feminist movement, Auel explores the problems associated with a male-dominated culture. Patriarchy leads to a host of social and political problems in any society and it is these problems that Auel wants to expose through her fiction. For example, the Clan women have no rights, no say in the power structure, and must be completely subservient to men in all ways.

Broud epitomizes the dangers of a patriarchal culture. He is so out of control that he beats Ayla almost to death and brutally rapes her on a daily basis for months afterwards. The physical and sexual violence that permeates the Clan social structure contribute as much to their extinction as does their cultural stagnation. In a bizarre twist, Auel makes the two truly good men—Creb and his trainee—Groov, sterile. Broud has three sons and a daughter by the end of the novel. However, the extremes of patriarchal culture eventually leads to the destruction of the cave and the displacing of Broud's people.

# Style

## Point of View

*The Clan of the Cave Bear* uses a third-person, omniscient narrator to explain Ay la's difficulties in assimilating into her adopted culture. The readers know exactly what is going to happen before the characters do. Because Broud's jealous feelings and Ay la's bewildered compliance are clearly drawn by the narrator, Ay la's exile from the Clan is inevitable from the moment she received her totem and stole Broud's thunder. The narration is so heavy-handed and thorough that it drains the novel of any dramatic irony or suspense. This point of view also allows Auel to develop fully her fictional ideas about Clan culture and to overload the reader with information on flint-knapping, medicinal plants, and hunting techniques. The narrator often intrudes into the novel with sociological tangents on why the Neanderthal people died out.

## Symbolism

Auel uses symbolism in two major ways: the spirit/totem world and traditional epic conventions. The Clan worships a collection of invisible spirits who inhabit the natural world and can cause illness, death, and bad luck if they are angered or ignored. These spirits generally take the form of totems or animal guides. Each Clan member is given a totem at his/her naming ceremony; the symbol for these totems are painted onto the infant's skin with a paste made of powdered red stone and bear fat. Later, when a boy becomes a man, the symbol of his totem is carved into his chest with a sharp stone knife. When women find mates, their man's totem symbols are painted over their own in a yellow paste. This process obviously symbolizes the dominance of the male over the female and the subsequent loss of identity of the female in the mating process.

In addition to the idea of totems and spirits, Auel also uses more traditional literary symbols from Biblical and epic literature. Ay la represents many different literary types. Not only is she the Eve figure whose actions, according to Broud and Creb, would cause the end of the Clan, she is also a Virgin Mary figure who gives birth to the savior of the Clan, i.e. Durc. Compounded with this image is the image of Christ returning from the dead and being forever changed. When Ayla returns from her one-month death sentence, she becomes "She Who Hunts." Like the great epic heroes Achilles, Beowulf, and Ulysses, Ayla represents the only force that can save the Clan—but only through her self-sacrifice and exile. Auel cleverly combines these images to give her fiction depth and meaning.

## Setting

Auel has stated in several interviews that she started writing about prehistoric peoples because it was a place and time that did not get much literary attention. Her story is set on the shores of the Black Sea roughly 25,000 years ago. However, she is forced to



describe plants, animals, and land formations as they are currently known so that readers would have some idea what she is talking about. Many of the plants that she describes in meticulous detail are modern and there is no physical evidence that they existed then.

The harsh realities of the time provide much of the novel's energy. The need for community, safety, and traditions are essential for survival, so Ayla's behavior threatens the Clan in ways that a modern heroine could not. At the same time, Ayla's ability to innovate and adapt shows that humans are still evolving. Most of Ayla's inventions and discoveries are only significant because no one has ever thought of them before.

## Ancient Science Fiction

No one can read Auel's novel without being amazed at her copious and thorough research. However, Auel's information is not always accurate and the line between the physical evidence and her own creations is blurred. Auel does a remarkable job of incorporating some anthropological evidence and should be credited with sparking people's interest in prehistoric peoples. However, she has a tendency to "core dump": when an author goes into vivid detail of some scientific or technical operation that has little or nothing to do with plot or character development. Most of Auel's descriptions of flint-knapping, medicine production, plant gathering, and butchering of game does not have any real relevance to the novel as a whole. Although *The Clan of the Cave Bear* does not fit the usual description of science fiction, Auel's use of modern plants, her blurring of fact and theory, and her tendency to core-dump show that the novel bears all the usual traits of a first-time science fiction novel.



# Historical Context

## What Happened to the Neanderthals

Perhaps the people most frustrated with the commercial success of *The Clan of the Cave Bear* are anthropologists and archaeologists. The problems revolve around Auel's physical descriptions of the Clan—whom she never calls Neanderthals—and her wholesale creation of their culture. While the theories surrounding the disappearance of Neanderthal peoples from Europe and Asia are still the subject of much scholarly debate, the vast majority of anthropologists and archaeologists agree (and agreed even at the time Auel was doing her research for the novel) that there was not an exaggerated physical difference between Neanderthal and modern humans.

William Straus and A. J. E. Cave stated in 1957 that "If [Neanderthal Man] could be reincarnated and placed in a New York subway—provided that he were bathed, shaved, and dressed in modern clothing—it is doubtful whether he would attract any more attention" than anyone else. In fact, the image of a hairy, bent-over, brutal race of cave dwellers is more a creation of Hollywood and a few nineteenth-century French anthropologists than any modern science.

For example, Auel describes the Clan as having bowed legs and arms, brown shaggy hair, and dark eyes. Quite a number of Neanderthal skeletons have been found and only a few have the bowed limbs as Auel described them, suggesting that this was a vitamin deficiency (rickets) rather than something common to the species. She also suggests that Clan members are old by the time they are thirty years of age, yet the majority of Neanderthal adult skeletons are adults in their fifties and sixties. Auel buys into Hollywood and the racist stereotypes when she portrays the Clan as a dark-haired, dark-eyed people—when there is no physical evidence for either their hair or eye color. The same goes for their inability to laugh, cry, or speak.

## Cultural Problems

However problematic her science is, Auel's real problems with anthropologists and social scientists come from her fabrication of Neanderthal culture. The problem is not that she creates a culture for these people, but that she does not make it clear where fact ends and her theories begin. Cultural anthropologists particularly object to the brutal nature of the Clan—especially since there is no evidence for it. They also object to the almost absurd theory that the Neanderthal race died out because their brains were wired to remember the past rather than plan for the future. The reason for the criticism is that while Auel does not claim that her fiction is true, it is usually the only exposure most people have to prehistoric peoples and so her distortion of scientific evidence and wholesale fabrication leaves many scientists cold. While most critics will admit that she did a considerable amount of research, many anthropologists and archeologists would argue that her research is shoddy and culturally biased.



## Racial Issues

Many people find the overt racism in *The Clan of the Cave Bear* unsettling. The Clan, comprised of Neanderthals, is described as primitive, dark, and without the ability to laugh or to cry. The Others—comprised of Cro-Magnon, the modern humans—as characterized by Ayla, are blond, blue-eyed, white-skinned, and beautiful. Even though the Clan thinks Ayla is ugly, the narrator lets the readers know that Ayla is an extraordinarily beautiful woman by Western standards. Auel says that she wanted to create a character that looks like "us" being raised in a completely alien environment. However, by casting her novel as stories about the earliest people, Auel seems to be suggesting that only blond, blue-eyed Aryan Euro-Americans can be "us."

## The Feminist Movement

On a positive note, most critics applaud Auel's creation of a strong female character at a time when American culture was looking for female heroes. The women's movement grew in earnest in the 1970s on the heels of the Civil Rights movement. Issues such as reproductive rights, equal pay for equal work, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination became part of the national debate. The Equal Rights Amendment showed signs of passage and many women joined the workforce in high-profile professional positions.

By 1980, with films like *9 to 5* and *Norma Rae*, a novel about a prehistoric female hero seemed quite logical. Auel uses Ayla to show contemporary Americans that a society that insists on subordination of one gender cannot survive. While many histories of prehistoric peoples focus on the accomplishments of the male half of the species, Auel tries to show how important women's contribution to survival was. Even though she has her hero banished at the end of the novel, Auel does not end Ayla's story there. Instead it is the repressive society of the Clan that is not heard from again in any of the other novels.



## Critical Overview

Jean Auel's novels have met with much popular success. Yet most literary critics and scholars

have problems with her work on several different levels. Some reviewers find her work lightweight in terms of character, plot, and style. In addition, many popular culture scholars, who seem to be the only ones who will address Auel's work directly, find her foreshadowing heavy-handed and boring.

There are similar problems with her mixture of fact and fiction. Lindsay Van Gelder questions Auel's commitment to both feminism and racial equality. She is particularly troubled with the idea that boys become men when they do something (hunt) yet girls do not become women until something is done to them (menstruation begins for Clan women and lose of virginity for Other women). Bernard Gallagher also suggests that Auel failed to create a truly feminist female hero because she allowed the Clan to break and destroy her. Clyde Wilcox contends that Auel's feminism does not fail outright nor along the lines Gallagher describes, because Auel is looking at a bigger picture than just one girl in one unhappy situation.

Many of the standard anthropology works published after 1980 address *The Clan of the Cave Bear*. James Shreeve mentions Auel's novel in the introduction to *The Neanderthal Enigma*, but he does not go into specifics. He does refute many of the scientific and cultural claims Auel makes about Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon society.

Other anthropologists do give Auel credit for increasing the popularity of prehistoric peoples, particularly woman. However, some cringe at the Hollywood overtones in the novel. For example, the Clan wears animal hide wraps that have no form of sewing or weaving in them. Yet, as Elizabeth Wayland Barber asserts, woven textiles have been found in salt mines that date to the periods that Auel is writing about. Other archeologists and anthropologists have found evidence of domesticated animals and woven textiles thousands of years older than Auel's Clan. Olga Soffer says that the old way of looking at prehistoric cultures has changed since the early 1980s, and suggests that the type of fiction Auel writes might be an influence.

There are times that Auel seems to outguess the scientists. In 1998, researchers suggested that, according to DNA evidence, the Neanderthal race did not contribute to modern human genetics and therefore are not related to modern humans in any real way. Not five months later, archeologists made two discoveries: one, a child's skeleton that had both Neanderthal features and Cro-Magnon features (much like Durc in the novel) and two, that Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons coexisted in Europe for over 10,000 years. The evidence of interbreeding between the human species was not available to Auel in the 1970s—she made it up. As Wilcox suggests, Auel is much more interested in exploring contemporary society than accurately investigating prehistoric cultures.

There is no dismissing the popular appeal of *The Clan of The Cave Bear*. It sold over one-hundred-thousand copies in its first three months. Auel's popularity, particularly among women, has grown in the years since the first novel's publication.



# Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4



# Critical Essay #1

*Rex is an adjunct professor at the University of Detroit Mercy. In the following essay, he explores how the social structure of The Clan of the Cave Bear reflects Auel's concerns for contemporary American society.*

Jean Auel's *The Clan of the Cave Bear* has been embraced as the most popular work of prehistoric fiction in American culture. Readers love getting caught up in the story of Ayla and how she tries to be true to herself and yet fit into the new culture. Many people see the novel as a possible, if not probable, depiction of life in the world of the Neanderthal. However, Auel creates the vast majority of Clan culture on no actual evidence. Instead, she creates a culture that is very much like the American society that Auel saw around her with a healthy dash of high Victorian culture mixed in with it. Auel does not really care about "truth" or accuracy in the way she is constructing Neanderthal culture. She is using the mask of this culture to critique how Americans in the late 1970s view religion, sex, and family.

Religion has always had a large influence on American culture. The pilgrims, who left England due to religious persecution, are celebrated every year at Thanksgiving. Alfred Smith lost the presidency in the 1920s because he was Catholic, while John F. Kennedy had to promise the American people that he would not "obey" the pope if he was elected. The Pledge of Allegiance says that America is "one Nation under God." However, our culture has inherited some interesting religious biases that Auel chooses to attack in her creation of religion in this novel; primarily the religious structure, the ceremonies, and the lack of participation by women.

The structure of the Clan's religion is highly illogical and tends to be more threatening than comforting. Clan members are not faithful because the spirits are good to them, generally they are faithful out of fear. Auel is drawing a direct parallel between this religious structure and contemporary religions that use fear and punishment as ways to coerce the behavior of the faithful. This idea can be seen in descriptions of Hell as a place of everlasting torment. Brun makes it very clear that he does not understand the world of the spirits, but he fears them. Creb can "talk" to the spirits during self-induced hypnotic states or during a hallucinogenic drug haze. In the Clan only men are allowed to participate in religion and so the religion tends toward violence and fear.

This tendency becomes evident in the ceremonies Auel describes in the novel. The first ceremony readers see is when the Clan is still wandering and the men have separated themselves from the women and children. They do this for a specific purpose. The ceremony is based on the men begging and pleading with the spirits, exposing how weak and vulnerable humans really are. The men cannot allow women to see this ceremony because it would threaten the male dominance if women realized that men were not in control all of the time.

This is a direct attack on American social structure. Auel suggests that American men are so threatened by the power of women in the workforce and the church that they



must continue discrimination against women as a method of control. The segregated ceremonies continue to grow in discrimination and brutality throughout the novel: children are not named by their parents, but by the Mog-ur, and the Manhood ceremony involves the Mog-ur carving the boy's totem symbol into his chest with a knife; the Womanhood ceremony involves the girl being exiled from the Clan and spending at least seven days completely alone; and the mating ceremony involves the male's totem symbol being painted over the woman's, thus erasing her spiritual identity.

This violence and brutality culminates in the festivities at the Great Clan Gathering. Here, Auel is attacking contemporary Christianity in rather gross ways. First, the Cave Bear cub symbolizes the Supreme Deity on earth much like Christ did. The Cave Bear has been tamed and raised by the host Clan until he is friendly and loving. Then the Clan turns on him, attacking him with spears and killing him. The people then drink the bear's blood and eat the bear's flesh in a direct parallel to the Christian communion. Of course, Auel takes the idea of communion one step further as she has the Mog-urs eat the brains of the warrior killed during the attack on the pet bear. All of these ceremonies serve as ways for Auel to demonstrate that contemporary religions are based on fear, violence, and domination over women.

The absence of women in the religion of the Clan is perhaps the most striking aspect and the most neglected one. Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Church, the two largest denominations in America, refuse to make women priests/preachers and insist on a subservient and almost nonexistent role for women in their religious services. Therefore, Auel's elimination of women from the Clan's religious life can be seen as a criticism of this aspect of modern Christianity.

However, the Clan does not allow women to participate in religion out of a need for domination, but out of fear of losing that domination. Creb remembers a time when women were allowed to participate, but it was so long ago and the Clan has changed so much that men would lose their power over women. Moreover, the spirits are all male. There is no spirit that women can pray to because women are not to speak to men until spoken to.

Again, this idea parallels the modern conception of God as male. However, by making the Clan religion male-based as well, Auel is rejecting contemporary religion. She seems to be suggesting that religions that are based on fear, violence, and domination of one gender over the other are unsuccessful, unsatisfying, and ultimately self-destructive.

In addition to critiquing American views of religion, Auel uses *The Clan of the Cave Bear* to attack American attitudes toward sex and reproduction. She creates the Clan as a people who, like many early peoples, do not understand the relationship between sex and pregnancy. For the Clan, pregnancy occurs when a woman's totem has been defeated by a man's totem. So, even in the creation of new life, the Clan is based on violence. Sex is not something that builds intimacy between hearth mates, nor is it described as something pleasurable. Sex is something women must endure and men use to "relieve their needs."



Auel's description of sexual activity attacks the stereotypical attitudes toward sex in the late 1970s and early 1980s. While the country was dancing to disco music and the sexual revolution was still going strong, the national attitudes toward sex continued to be defined by men: sex was for men's benefit and men's pleasure. Women were still conceived of as baby producers and male playthings. This is the image of female-male relationships that Auel wants to challenge.

By making Broud's sexual advances toward Ayla attacks, she shows the reader that cultural attitudes about sex have not changed. In a male-dominated society, women cannot be raped because the crime does not exist. In the Clan, any man can have sex with any woman at any time; she has no say in the matter. Sex is also performed in only one position—the woman on her hands and knees with the man coming from behind her. There is no face-to-face contact, no closeness. Sex, for the Clan, has no spiritual or emotional elements. Auel uses the sexual attitudes of the Clan to attack American attitudes toward sex, women, and the family.

Auel saves her strongest criticism for American attitudes toward the family. Although she is writing about a people who lived roughly 25,000 years ago, Auel still has them living in a modern nuclear family structure of dominate male, submissive female, and children. The gender discrimination as well as the analogy to American society is quite clear. The hearth or house belongs to the male; the female must cook, clean, and maintain the hearth, but she has no ownership in it. Women also have no choice in selecting their mates. Instead, the leader, the ultimate "father," selects a man for her. Again, she has no choice in the matter.

The mating ceremony reads almost like a modern wedding: the ceremony is held in public, the Mog-ur asks the man if he accepts the woman, and then he erases the woman's identity by drawing the totem symbol of her mate over the tattoo of her own totem symbol. The parallel between this ceremony and modern American marriage where a woman goes from being Jane Doe to Mrs. John Smith is absolutely clear. Women lose their identity in marriage. Auel argues that this is an outgrowth of a repressive, regressive, and failing social system.

The contributions of the Clan women are also generally ignored by the Clan men. Auel makes her readers aware of just how important the women's work in terms of food, clothing, and tool production is—but the Clan men do not recognize it. This is often the case in American culture as well. A housewife is defined as a woman who does not work—yet it is very expensive to hire someone to clean, cook, do the grocery shopping, and errand running that housewives are expected to do. Again Auel is attacking male cultural attitudes about the contributions and duties of women.

Even though only women can give birth, this does not give them power within the Clan. When Iza gives birth, Eba regrets that the child is a girl when she gives Brun the news. Likewise, the women are shocked that Iza asked for a girl. Whether a child lives or dies is not up to the women either. In Clan society, the men get together and "vote" on whether the child is normal or deformed. A mother can beg for the life of her child, but she has no assurance that the leader will grant her request. Another parallel to



American culture is the stigma of an illegitimate birth. Ayla is not mated when she gives birth to Durc and this causes some unrest among the Clan. Children born out of wedlock are not as accepted as those who are□yet Durc will be the savior of his race.

In terms of the domestic situations of the Clan, Auel paints a rather conservative, traditional picture. Their religion, use of sex, and the family structures all bear marked resemblance to contemporary American cultural institutions. By using these structures, Auel is attacking the sexist nature of American culture. The Clan, although interesting, is ultimately unsuccessful and doomed to extinction. This rigid system of gender discrimination, religious fear, and separation of domestic tasks is what ultimately destroys the Clan. A society that is so biased toward one gender cannot survive, no matter how many generations it goes through. Auel's final statement in *The Clan of the Cave Bear* is a warning to American society that if it continues to subordinate women and ignore their spiritual, sexual, and familial needs, American culture will be just as dead as the Clan. Extinction will only be a matter of "when," no longer a question of "if."

**Source:** Michael Rex, in an essay for *Novels for Students*, Gale Group, 2001.



## Critical Essay #2

*In the following essay, Wilcox argues that Auel's works can be considered feminist.*

*The Clan of the Cave Bear* and the three other novels in Jean Auel's Earth's Children series are surprising best-sellers. They blend carefully researched and detailed accounts of the making of flint tools, the construction of lodges from mammoth bones, and the flora and fauna of Europe during the last Ice Age with an almost soap-opera account of the life of a blond, blue-eyed woman named Ayla. Orphaned by an earthquake at an early age, Ayla was raised by a clan of Neanderthals, who teach her to be a healer. When Ayla continues to violate clan taboos, she is exiled, where she meets another Cro-Magnon man and begins a long journey to what is now Eastern Europe to visit his home.

Recently, Bernard Gallagher has argued that *The Clan of the Cave Bear* constitutes a failed feminist novel. He reports that he initially regarded the novel as a real triumph but is now disappointed in the book. He graciously notes that he is "not suggesting, now, that Auel rewrite the ending to her novel" that sold millions of copies, inspired a rather awful film, and has led to the publication of additional books in the series. But he does suggest that the book reflects the view that relations between the sexes are "a matter of either/or. Either men are dominant or women are dominant." He sees the book primarily as a tale of the conflict between an independent and talented woman and a patriarchal culture that reviles her, yet he argues that the book contains certain elements that prevent it from fitting a feminist category.

I think that Gallagher is too hard on this novel, and that perhaps a reconsideration will enable him to again think of Auel's work as truly feminist. I will suggest that Auel's work must be considered in a wider context—that of the types of humans of which she writes, and that of the other novels in the series. Within that broader context, Auel's work can be considered feminist. Of course, there are a wide variety of feminist theories and approaches (Pateman and Gross). Auel's feminism might be described as one that entails equality of access to political power and occupations, and a blending of gender roles.

Gallagher is correct that Auel depicts women of the Neanderthal clan as quite subservient to men. Indeed, a woman of the Clan must kneel before a man and wait for a signal before she speaks, and must allow any man who wishes, to "relieve his needs" with her. Yet it is not the sexism of the Neanderthals that troubles Gallagher, for he finds Auel's account of the sexism embedded in Clan customs and language to be a truly feminist critique. Rather he makes three arguments. First, in the battle between the sexes, Ayla is given a weak and unworthy opponent. Second, Ayla is described as a classic blond-haired beauty. Finally, the novel ends with the banishment of Ayla for violating tribal taboos.

Let us consider the ending of *The Clan of the Cave Bear*, in which Ayla is banished by the new leader of the Clan. Throughout the novel, Ayla is unable to always behave in



the subservient way that Neanderthal men expect. Although only Neanderthal men are allowed to hunt, Ayla teaches herself to hunt, and invents a method of using a sling that is better than that of any man. When she gives birth to a half-Neanderthal, half-Cro-Magnon child, she refuses to obey an order by the Clan leader to let it die (for it appears initially deformed because of the mixed traits of the two human species). Each of these acts leads to some sort of penalty, including a temporary banishment. Finally, she violates the order of the Clan leader and rushes to the aid of a dying man, and this leads to her final banishment and a declaration that she is "dead."

Gallagher correctly notes that Ayla's independence has led her to banishment, and to her separation from her son. He concludes that "the novel seems to suggest that male-female relationships, by their nature, involve a struggle for power that never ends, a struggle in which someone must be the slave and someone must be the master." And the message seems to be that women who seek to become the master are ultimately cut off from society.

Yet Gallagher misses one important point—this is also a clash between Cro-Magnons and Neanderthals. Gallagher notes that Auel paints a physical picture of Neanderthals that is a bit more primitive than many current anthropologists would support. Yet he ignores one other fictional characteristic of the Neanderthals—the one that is most clearly an invention of Auel. Auel exaggerates the differences between Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon skulls, where the Neanderthal had a smaller frontal lobe but an enlarged rear portion of the brain. From this, she posits the existence of a racial memory that almost dictates the actions of Neanderthals. Early in the novel, she notes that this memory had served the Neanderthals well as the ice advanced and retreated, for they could recall from an earlier period whether new vegetation was poisonous or good to eat. When confronted with a seemingly new situation that an ancestor had encountered before, a Neanderthal would simply remember the course of action that had worked in the past. Most surprising is that these memories are sex specific. Auel writes that Memories in Clan people were sex differentiated.

Women had no more need of hunting lore than men had of more than rudimentary knowledge of plants. The difference in the brains of men and women was imposed by nature, and only cemented by culture. It was another of nature's attempts to limit the size of their brains in an effort to prolong the race.

These racial memories were associated with an inability to rapidly adjust to new developments. Ayla presented the clan with a challenge, for they could not understand a woman who would hunt. Women of the clan had no interest in, and no facility for, hunting because they lacked the memories. Men were similarly incapable of cooking. Although the notion of a racial memory has no basis in scientific research, the Neanderthals inhabited Europe for 100,000 years but showed no evidence of cultural accumulation—their stone tools did not become more subtle, they persisted in the use of heavy spears for thrusting instead of lighter ones for throwing, and in no Neanderthal site has there been any figurative art.





They were slow to adapt. Inventions were accidental and often not utilized. . . . Change was accomplished only with great effort. . . . But a race with no room for learning, no room for growth, was no longer equipped for an inherently changing environment.

The Neanderthals are shown as mentally limited. When Creb, the Neanderthal spiritual leader, tries to teach Ayla a few "counting words," he is astonished that she is immediately able to grasp abstract mathematical concepts that are beyond his ability. In another passage, Creb and Ayla explore their common past and different future in a drug-induced journey. Creb sees that his people will become extinct, while Ayla's will go on to inherit the earth. Although Creb is portrayed as the most intelligent Neanderthal, Ayla is more mentally agile.

In this light, the unwillingness of the Neanderthals to accommodate Ayla's feminism is a bit more understandable. They are unable to change, and like Topol in *Fiddler on the Roof*, they bend and bend and finally break. Broud, the young leader who ultimately expels Ayla is a twisted, jealous man who had raped her to gain power over her, but the other Neanderthals who go along with the banishment are often portrayed as caring, decent individuals. They also are unable to accept or understand her behavior, for it is beyond their limited cognitive abilities. What we see in this book is not an inevitable war between the sexes, but a war between competing species of humans. Gallagher's first problem with the novel, that Broud was an inadequate foil for Ayla, misses the point. The book is not about Ayla vs. Broud, although this occupies a portion of the novel, but rather about how Neanderthals and Cro-Magnon humans would deal with an entirely new and challenging situation.

The extinction of the Neanderthals remains one of the most interesting mysteries of prehistory. Some have argued that Cro-Magnon humans killed the Neanderthals, others that the superior hunting tools enabled them to kill off some of the game on which the Neanderthals relied. Still other anthropologists have suggested that the Neanderthals and Cro-Magnon peoples interbred, although at least one anthropologist suggests that they would have been unable to produce offspring. Auel seems to suggest that the Neanderthals died out because they were unable to adapt to the end of the Ice Age, because their brains were wired to remember the past and not to plan for the future. Creb and Ayla see that the Cro-Magnon will triumph because of their greater flexibility and adaptability. Auel may be making a more general point that any society that uses past behavior as an invariable guide to present decisions will fail. Auel's novel implies that any society that rejects the innovations of its most creative citizens because of their gender, race or other characteristics, will ultimately perish.

The ending of the book remains a problem, however. Clearly Ayla's banishment is an unhappy event. In a later book she notes that she would have gladly stayed with the Clan as second woman to the jealous leader to be near her son. Is the message of the book that feminism ultimately leads to a loss of family? The last line in *The Clan of the Cave Bear* is a plaintive call of "Maamaaa!" from Ayla's son. No mother or father can read the ending of this book without a pang of sorrow.





To put this in a broader perspective, it is useful to examine the three additional books in the series that have appeared to date. In *The Valley of the Horses*, Ayla lives alone in a valley for three years. During this time, she learns to hunt with a spear, and she domesticates a horse and a cave lion and rides each in the hunt. When her future husband Jondalar suffers a deep thigh gash from her cave lion, she examines the stitching in his garments (Neanderthals did not sew) and threads together his flesh. She learns to speak (Auel depicts Neanderthals as speaking primarily in sign language—a point of some controversy today among anthropologists,) and learns to throw a spear more accurately than Jondalar. Jondalar is described as in a manner much like Ayla—tall, blond-haired, blue-eyed and very attractive. Thus Gallagher's second concern, that Ayla is described as a physical beauty, can be seen in a different light. That Ayla and Jondalar must be Aryan beauties is perhaps a concession to the soap-opera part of Auel's market, but it is not a mark of sexism. Presumably Auel believes it is necessary to have attractive characters to help fuel her somewhat predictable sex scenes in the later novels.

More importantly, Ayla meets many other Cro-Magnon people—who act and think like she does. Thus although Ayla has lost her half-Neanderthal son, she has found people like herself. Jondalar is a feminist ideal man, interested in cooking, anxious to have Ayla help with the hunt, and truly in awe of her abilities. He displays a troubling racism (or speciesism) about the Neanderthals, but he gradually comes to terms with this and accepts the Neanderthals as fully human. Ayla mourns the loss of her son throughout the next two books, although by the end of the fourth novel, she is pregnant again. It appears that the novels in this series are building to a confrontation between her fully Cro-Magnon child and her half-Neanderthal son in the final book of the series. The banishment of Ayla can be interpreted as a rejection by a society unable to change, but it ultimately leads Ayla into a broader Cro-Magnon society of people who think and act like she does.

Consider Auel's view of gender politics among the Cro-Magnon. In the third novel *The Mammoth Hunters* the pair stay for a time on the plains with a group of Cro-Magnon hunters. This group is part of the Matutoi people, who hunt mammoths. The tribe is ruled by a headman and headwoman, who share equal power and responsibility. Decision-making is by consensus, with everyone taking a chance to speak by holding the speaking stick, and women taking an active role. The larger Matutoi people are governed by a Council of Sisters (made up of the headwomen of the tribes) and a Council of Brothers (made up of the headmen), but the women make the final decision because they are closer to the "Great Mother." All of the Cro-Magnon people encountered in these novels appear to believe in a female deity, and the Danube river is referred to as the Great Mother River.

In the fourth novel, *The Plains of Passage*, Ayla and Jondalar leave the Matutoi and journey toward Jondalar's home. They visit first the Samu-doi. Women of the Samudoi take part in tribal decision-making, and men help with the cooking while women help with the hunting.



In this novel, however, is the best evidence for anti-feminism in Auel's writings, for Auel depicts a very dysfunctional society ruled by women. Jondalar is captured by the S'Armunai, a tribe in which the headwoman has penned up the men of the tribe in a prison structure. The woman who heads the tribe is mad, and dislocates the legs of young boys as they pass through puberty. She challenges Jondalar to mate with her, and tries to kill him. Yet Ayla rescues him with a perfectly thrown spear. Her domesticated wolf finally kills the demented leader, and the men and women of the tribe cautiously reunite and begin to patch up a relationship.

In some ways, this section reads like a Phyllis Schlafly nightmare. Before Ayla intervenes, the women who rule this tribe torment the men, and all are starving because the entire burden of gathering food has fallen to the women. It is possible to read this story as suggesting the ultimate failure of a society in which women control government power. A more narrow reading might suggest that if angry feminists ever gained power, men would suffer from discrimination, families would be broken, and society would suffer.

Yet there is evidence within this story to suggest that Auel does not intend it as an anti-feminist parable, or at least that she does not mean to imply that a society in which women make the crucial decisions will be dysfunctional. Auel does not imply in this section that women are unable to rule, for Jondalar's mother once ruled his tribe, and the Council of Sisters rule the mammoth hunters. Rather, she appears to hold that, like the Neanderthal, the S'Armunai are unable to fully function as a people without the close cooperation of men and women. Jondalar initially is stunned to learn that the tribe would prevent half of its population from helping with the hunting and gathering. Note that Jondalar is unable to free himself, and only Ayla is able to depose the mad ruler, so relief comes from a strong woman, not from a man. Interestingly, the mad woman ruler had been seriously abused by a half-Neanderthal mate, which appears to have caused her mental problems. Auel may intend this section to show that men and women must work together, regardless of previous discrimination, if society is to prosper.

Of course, there are some parts of these four novels that do not strike a consistent feminist theme. We learn that Jondalar's mother voluntarily relinquished her rule of her tribe to her son. Ayla chooses a man to rule the S'Armunai after the death of the mad woman ruler. Ayla follows Jondalar to his home, despite her preference to stay with some of the peoples they visit along the way. These are not utopian novels, and Auel writes for several seemingly distinct audiences. Yet overall, there are obvious elements of an egalitarian feminism in Auel's work.

Throughout these four novels, we see Ayla as a resourceful woman who generally does what she wants. She hunts and heals, combining the traditional masculine with the feminine. Her hunting skills astonish everyone, as do her abilities in medicine. The shamen of the tribes she visits constantly marvel at her spiritual gifts, and she appears to have genuine visions of the future. She is tough but compassionate. She domesticates a horse, a lion and a wolf. She invents surgical stitching, and many other things too numerous to mention. That she is also a beautiful blue-eyed blond does not detract from her feminist credentials.



In the later novels, she frequently confronts adversity from strength. In *The Mammoth Hunters* many Mamutoi at a large gathering of the tribes muttered among themselves about Ayla's previous ties with the Neanderthals. Indeed, Ayla faces up to this apparently deep-seated speciesism among the Cro-Magnon at every occasion. In this novel, a half-Neanderthal child adopted by the tribe she was visiting came to the meeting, and Ayla let it be known that she had given birth to such a child. When some of the more speciesist members of the Mamutoi want to expel her, the tribe with which she stayed claims her as a member. Yet it is with a show of power that Ayla wins the battle, for she rescues a girl who appears in danger from a cave lion—the one she had domesticated. The muttering is halted when Ayla mounts and rides a lion that is as large as modern horse.

In *The Plains of Passage*, Ayla rescues Jondalar by throwing a spear that cuts the ropes that bind him—an accuracy that is almost impossible. She liberates the people of this tribe when her tame wolf kills the woman who ruled. This is a confrontation between two strong women, and Ayla wins by a real show of strength. Where Ayla left the Neanderthals in defeat, among the Cro-Magnon her drive and skills are amply rewarded. After her victory through the tough use of force, she uses her skills as a healer to begin to rebuild the tribe.

Moreover, Cro-Magnon peoples are shown as generally egalitarian in the sex roles. Jondalar is as interested in cooking as Ayla is in hunting. Women are consistently shown in real decision-making authority. In contrast, the now-extinct Neanderthals are shown as sexist and unable to accept women as equals. Those who are unable to move beyond rigid sex roles are now extinct, while the more flexible Cro-Magnon are our direct ancestors. Overall, this seems a strongly feminist message.

Gallagher can resume his respect for Auel's feminism. Her novels may not portray a prehistoric feminist utopia, but taken in context they have a strongly feminist message. She depicts a pre-his-tory that is perhaps even more egalitarian than our present society, in which men and women must share evenly the burdens and opportunities in order for both to survive.

**Source:** Clyde Wilcox, "The Not-so-Failed Feminism of Jean Auel," in *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 28, No. 3, Winter 1994, pp. 63-70.



## Critical Essay #3

*In the following interview, Auel discusses the research and development behind her series.*

*[O'Connell] When you started writing the Earth's Children series, did you have any idea how popular it would become?*

[Auel] No. I hoped what every writer hopes: that the first book would find a market and an audience, and maybe the second one would do a little better. That certainly has happened; it just started at a much higher level. The first printing of *The Clan of the Cave Bear* was 75,000 books. And the first printing in hardcover for *The Mammoth Hunters* was a million books. It broke the record. Somebody figured out that that would be a stack of books twenty-nine miles high.

*Did you have any model in mind when you wrote these books?*

No. I was just trying to write these stories. I'm still writing for myself. I'm writing the story I always wanted to read. As it turns out a whole lot of others want to read it, too. I'm not writing for critics, or to please a teacher or to please the public, or anyone else; I'm writing stories to please myself.

The first rough draft has become an outline for the *Earth's Children* series. That's why I know I'm going to have six books. People think, "She wrote *The Clan of the Cave Bear* and since it was successful, she decided to do a sequel."

But this series is not like *Clan II*, and *Rocky III* and *Jaws IV*. It is a continuation, not a repetition. I won't be telling the same story over and over again. I really did know, before I finished *The Clan of the Cave Bear*, that I had six books in the series.

*Do the other books go further into Ayla's life?*

All of the books feature Ayla. They are the story of her life. It's not a generational saga, one of those things where you start with the first generation and you end up with the great grandchildren. I'm trying to show the diversity, complexity and sophistication of the various cultures during the Pleistocene. Ayla's story is the thread that ties them together.

*Did you base the cave dwelling described in *The Clan of the Cave Bear* on a particular arche-ological site?*

Not expressly. It's more like a typical site. It was based in many ways on the cave at Shanidar in Iraq on the southern side of the Black Sea, but the setting is in the Crimea on the northern shore of the Black Sea, because there were Neanderthal caves all through that area. It typifies a Neanderthal setting.

*How did you become interested in prehistoric people?*



[Laughs] I wish I had a wonderful answer for that. Everyone asks, and I don't have an answer. I started out with an idea for a story. I thought it would be a short story. That was in January, 1977. I had quit my job as a credit manager. I had received an M.B.A. in 1976, so I wasn't going to school, and my kids were almost grown. I was in between, not sure what I wanted to do, in a floating state, which I hadn't been in before. I had had a very busy life.

It was eleven o'clock at night. My husband said, "C'mon, let's go to bed." I said, "Wait a minute. I want to see if I can do something."

An idea had been buzzing through my head of a girl or young woman who was living with people who were different. I was thinking prehistory, but I don't know why. I was thinking, "These people were different, but they think she's different." They were viewing her with suspicion, but she was taking care of an old man with a crippled arm, so they let her stay. This was the beginning. That night I started to write the story. I had never written fiction before. It got to be the wee hours of the morning, I was about ten or twelve pages into it and I decided, "This is kind of fun." Characters, theme and story were starting.

But I was also frustrated because I didn't know what I was writing about. I'd want to describe something and I wouldn't know how or where they lived or what they looked like, what they wore, or what they ate, or if they had fire. I didn't have any sense of the place or the setting. So I thought, "I'll do a little research."

I started out with the Encyclopedia Britannica, and that led to books at the library. I came home with two armloads, and started reading them. I learned that the people we call Cro-Magnon were modern humans. The stereotype of Neanderthal is of a knuckle-dragging ape, but they were Homo sapiens also, quite advanced human beings.

I felt as though I'd made a discovery. "Why don't we know this? Why aren't people writing about our ancestors the way these books are depicting them?" That became the story I wanted to tell: the scientifically valid, updated version.

*So you wanted to clear up this misunderstanding?*

Also tell a story. It's always been the story first. I discovered that I love being a storyteller. I wanted to write a good story, but also to characterize these people in a way that is much more acceptable currently by the anthropological and archeological community.

*Was it difficult to turn this archeological material into a story?*

Well, any kind of writing is difficult. Basically, as I was reading those first fifty books, I began to take notes of what might be useful to the story. Then I put together a page, or page-and-a-half outline for a novel. I sat down at my typewriter, and started to tell the story to myself.



Now, if I were to compile a bibliography of my reading for the series, it would approach a thousand entries. I've also traveled to Europe, and taken classes in wilderness survival and native life ways. In terms of the research, I probably read about ten or 100 times more than I needed, until I got so comfortable with the material that I could move my characters around in the story with ease.

I wasn't thinking of getting it published. I was just thinking of the story. As I started to write it, the story started to grow and develop, and the ideas I had picked up in the research were finding their way into it.

*How long did it take you to write the rough draft?*

It didn't take any more than six or seven months, from the time of the first idea to the time I finished a huge six-part manuscript that became the outline for the series. I had free time then. I didn't have any other demands on my time, except just to live and say hello and goodbye to my husband once in a while. He was really quite supportive. I became totally obsessed and involved and excited. I found myself putting in every waking moment. I'd get up and I'd almost resent taking a shower before sitting down at the typewriter. I was putting in twelve, fourteen, sixteen hours a day, seven days a week.

*What happened to the rough draft?*

I went back and started to read it, and it was awful. I was telling the story to myself but it wasn't coming through on the page. I thought, "My feeling and my passion are not there." So then I went back to the library to get books on how to write fiction.

After doing a lot of self-study, I started to rewrite this big mass of words. I thought I was going to cut it down. About halfway through the first of these six parts I discovered I had 100,000 words. In adding scene and dialogue and description and everything necessary to write a novel, the thing was growing. I thought, "I'm doing something wrong. At this rate I'm going to end up with a million-and-a-half words." Talk about a writer's block.

I went back and really looked at the six different parts, and realized that I had too much to cram into one novel. What I had was six different books. I can still remember telling my husband, "I've got six books," He said, "You've never written a short story, and now you're going to write six books?" *Earth's Children* became the series title, and **the first book became** *The Clan of the Cave Bear*.

*The series seems to have a very modern sensibility. Is it as much about people today as it is about prehistoric people?*

It's about the struggles of human society. My characters are fully human; they have as much facility with their language as we do, which is why I started to write it in perfectly normal English, even though it would have pleased some critics if I had invented some kind of a phony construct of a language.





I think it's more accurate to show them speaking with ease. So I said, "I'm going to write this as though I am translating it from whatever language they spoke into our language." And good translators don't translate word for word, they translate idiom. There were some words I was careful with. For example, you can say, "Just a moment," but you can't say, "Just a minute."

*What made these people's lives different from our own?*

The world they lived in. There are a lot of things that we take for granted that hadn't been invented yet. But when Ayla in *The Clan of the Cave Bear* is five years old, she could have been anyone's five-year-old daughter today.

Because we're talking about people like ourselves, it allows me to look at ourselves from a different perspective, through a long-distance lens. I try to see what makes us human. What is basic to being human?

For example, if you plunk somebody down in a hunting-and-gathering society rather than a society where you go into your supermarket and get your meat out of a nice clean plastic package, what will be different and what will be the same? And is one society more or less violent? In most hunting-gathering societies, people feel a great deal of reverence for the animals they hunt. And we who get our packaged, sterilized meat that doesn't even bleed any more really have very little sensitivity to animals.

So there are some definite changes. But there certainly had to be some things that we suffer from, that they also suffered from.

*Did you find that you admired these people?*

Well, I felt that they were as human as we are, and I admired them, the same way I admire us. Unlike some people, I don't think the world is necessarily going to hell in a handbasket. I think that the human race is a very young race, and I am hoping that we will have the sense to keep ourselves from the destruction that we are potentially capable of dealing to ourselves. For all the stereotype about the brutal savagery of our ancestors, you find almost no evidence of it in the research, not among the Neanderthals and not among the Cro-Magnon.

One of the skeletons found at that Shanidar cave was of an old man. If you read about an old man with one arm amputated at the elbow and one eye that was blind, then you have to start asking, "How did he live to be an old man?" Paleopathologists believe that he had probably been paralyzed from an early age, because there was extensive boathrophy and he was lame on that side. The paralysis may have been the reason his arm was amputated. So he was probably a paralyzed boy and at some time in his life became blind in one eye.

How does that fit in with survival of the fittest? These were Neanderthals taking care of a crippled boy and a blind and crippled old man. Evidence indicates he died in a rock fall as an old man. When I read about him I said, "Oh, my God, there's my old man with



the crippled arm. There's the character in my story." That made me feel I was heading in the right direction. He became Creb.

*And as you researched this book, did you find that your story grew in a lot of ways?*

Exactly. And it was so much more interesting and fun to write within the modern scientific interpretation. I thought, "There's so much to write about, and I'm going to be the one to write it."

*Did you do research in fields other than archeology?*

Oh, yes. Many others. I would wonder, "How did they carry water? What kinds of things will carry water?" And by reading the reports of field anthropologists into more modern societies—the aborigines, the Bushmen, or the American Indians—you find out that watertight baskets will carry water, or carved wooden bowls, or water-tight stomachs.

I drew from all over the world. If it was appropriate and came together, then that's what I would use. I tried to give the sensitivity, the feeling of the hunting-gathering society.

For example, the idea of ancestor worship: when I was reading about the Australian aborigines, I learned that at one time they didn't really have a full understanding of procreation, particularly the male role in procreation. They knew a woman gave birth, but they weren't sure how she got pregnant. That led to speculation for my story.

I thought, "What if this was a time so long ago, that the male role wasn't understood by most people. What would be the result?" Well, the only parent they would know for certain would be their mother, and her mother before that, and the mother before that, and maybe somebody would think, "Who was the first mother?"

You could see how a whole mythology based on the miracle of birth could evolve. Then I remembered about all these little figurines dating back to the early Cro-Magnon period, these round, motherly women carvings. I thought, "I wonder if they aren't meant to represent a great mother sense." That's how I derived some of the culture ideas.

*When you were telling a story, did you have to pick and choose among the evidence to decide what pieces to use?*

Of course. For instance, did Neanderthals talk? There are two schools of thought on that. Professor Lieberman at Brown University is the proponent of the idea that there probably was some limitation in Neanderthals' ability to communicate, to talk, verbalize, and Lewis Binford finds little in the archeological record to show that they were able to make the necessary abstractions for full speech. But their cranial capacity, the size of their brains, was, on the average, larger than ours. And other scientists say that the evidence of their culture suggests that they were able to understand some abstractions. They were the first people to bury their dead with ritual and purpose. Somebody must have been thinking, "Where are we coming from and where are we going?" That gives us a clue that the way they thought might not be so different from the way we think, or at least feel. Emotions such as compassion, love and caring come through most strongly.





*So they must have had, if not language, at least. . .*

At least a very strong ability to communicate, which is why I came up with the sign language idea. I said, "Okay, I'll take both of these ideas and combine them. I will say, 'Yes, there was a limitation in their language, but not in their ability to communicate.'" Sign languages are very complex. I did some research into that.

*So if there's a gap between pieces of evidence, you can bridge the gap with your imagination?*

Yes. And sometimes I can push things out. I can go a little farther than a scientist can go, because I am writing a novel. I might stretch the barrier, but I don't want to break through it. I don't want to write anything that would do a disservice to the latest findings of science. I want the background to be as accurate as I can make it. If the basis is factual, then I have something for my imagination to build on.

The character of Jondalar is based on an actual skeleton found at the site called Cro-Magnon, the site that gives the name to the early race. They found five skeletons at this particular site. One of them was of a man who was 6 feet, 5 3/4 inches tall. As soon as I read that, I said, "That's got to be Ay la's man."

*Does this attention to detail make the story more believable?*

People say, "You're writing fiction. What do you do research for? Why don't you just make it up?" Well, in a work of fiction, even if it's a modern novel set in Washington, D.C., if you're going to mention the address of the White House, you'd better have that address right. Because if all the basic facts that you put down are as accurate as you can get them, it aids readers in suspending their sense of disbelief. As a novelist you want to have readers believe, at least while they're reading the story, that all this could be true.

*Where did the information about the herbs and medicines that the people used come from?*

I have a research library now of books I've purchased, and I got some of the information from public libraries. We know that they were hunting-gathering people and we know that modern hunter-gatherers are very, very familiar with their environment. Some groups can name 350 plants, know all of their stages and all of their uses. While we don't know precisely what plants Neanderthals or Cro-Magnons used, from pollen analysis and from the way we're able to tell climate, we know what plants were probably growing there because the same plants are around today. Except domestic plants were in their wild form.

*Did it give the people any advantage to be closely tied to the natural world?*

It would give them the advantage of being able to live in their world. They needed it to survive. That is survival in the natural world. There's also survival in New York City. If you were to take an aborigine, or a Cro-Magnon moved up in time and set him in the middle



of the modern world, and if he were an adult, how would he make a living? He wouldn't have grown up in our society, or gone to school. He might have all kinds of knowledge and background but it would not be useful to him any more, and would not have the same value.

That happened in this country to native cultures when the white Europeans invaded and began to settle. For example, the Northwest Coast Indian society was a very rich culture and they built houses out of cedar planks. It is very difficult to split a log and make it into planks by hand with wedges and mauls; it takes knowledge, skill and effort, so each one of those planks had a high value.

Now, if a white settler puts in a sawmill, and suddenly they're whipping out planks at many times the number per day than a person can do by hand, the plank no longer has the same value; it has lost its meaning within Indian society. Culturally and economically the Native-American people were deprived. And that's part of the problem today, the displacement that many of them feel.

What our early ancestors knew enabled them to live and survive in their world. We wouldn't know how to follow the tracks of an animal or when they migrate, but we have to know airline schedules and how to cross a street without getting hit by a car.

*Do you use elements of the Northwest landscape in your work?*

Oh, absolutely. It was really kind of fun when I discovered, particularly in *The Clan of the Cave Bear*, that there's a little mountain range at the south end of the Crimea, which is a peninsula in the Black Sea, and a strip of coastland which is Russia's Riviera today. During the Ice Age that was a temperate climate. There were cold steppes to the north, but the mountain range protected the southern end. This small coastal area was a well-watered, temperate, mountainous region subject to maritime influences, not so different from the Northwest. I even discovered that azaleas grow wild there, as they do here.

*Did setting the story in that particular kind of landscape create certain constraints?*

Well, you can't have a story, you can't have anything, if you don't have limits, boundaries. You can't have one setting that is arctic and equatorial all at the same time. So yes, it puts limits, constraints, but those are usually fairly welcome limits. It gives you a frame to write within.

*Was there an abundance of food during that period?*

Most scientists and most researchers think that the last Ice Age period was probably richer than it was later during more temperate times. The glaciers caused a certain kind of environment that made for open steppes, or grasslands. Those vast grasslands fed grazing animals in hundreds of thousands of millions. It was also rich in terms of the produce that was available, so there were both animal and vegetable resources.

As the glaciers retreated, the forest started to move in, and forests aren't as rich. They don't support great herds of animals. Instead, animals stay either in small family groups



or alone. The deer that run through the forest don't congregate in huge herds like the bison on the plains, and they're also harder to hunt because the animals can find trees and brush to hide among. It's much easier to hunt an animal on an open plain than when it's hidden in the woods.

In forests, there's more tree-growth, but not necessarily as much variety of plant-growth. So when the glacier melted, it reduced the abundance and variety of plant species. In the late Pleistocene, after the Ice Age, evidence of much more use of fishing and shell food was found. Such climatic changes may have caused pressures toward agriculture. The great variety and abundance was gone. Some way had to be found to feed the population.

*Do you get a lot of mail back from your readers?*

I do get a lot of letters from readers, and I'm very grateful for them. People become quite ardent; there are readers who feel very, very strongly about these books. It's a surprise to me. I'm delighted, but I'm a little overwhelmed. I don't really know what I'm doing right.

I get letters from men and women of all ages, twelve to ninety-two, and all walks of life—engineers, scientists, marines, lawyers, teachers, and people who barely can put together a grammatical sentence.

I even get letters from prisoners in jail. The one that I didn't know quite how to handle was a letter from a man who said he was on death row, and would I hurry up and finish *The Mammoth Hunters* so he could read it before he died? I didn't know what to say.

*What do you plan to write in the future?*

I intend to write all six books in the series. That's an internal pressure. I have to finish telling Ay la's story. She won't let me alone.

*And after that?*

I may do anything. I may write about other prehistoric people. I may change to a different part of the world. I may write about later prehistoric periods. I may write something historical. I may write something modern. I might write science fiction. I might write a horror story, or a mystery. Who knows? I've got many things that I'd like to try. What I do know now is that I want to keep on writing, but I was forty before I knew what I wanted to do when I grew up.

*Why was that?*

I don't know. I suspect part of it is that I couldn't have done it any earlier. There are many young people who are fine writers, but I could not have been one. I needed to live some life and gain some experiences. I couldn't have written what I did without having gone through having a family, raising children, accepting responsibility, being out there



in the world, working, coming across many different kinds of people and learning how to live with them.

**Source:** Nicholas O'Connell, An interview with Jean Auel in *At the Field's End*, Maronda Publishers, 1987, pp. 208-19.

*Lindsay Van Gelder*

*While praising Auel's creation of a strong female protagonist in the review below, Van Gelder faults the author for creating social interactions which are too similar to "modern" society.*

I began hearing about them several years ago, always from feminist friends who said things like "You absolutely *have to* read these books." Jean M. Auel's "Earth's Children" novels—*The Clan of the Cave Bear*, *The Valley of Horses*, and *The Mammoth Hunters*—have since gone from feminist word-of-mouth classics to a major mainstream phenomenon. *Hunters* hit the number-one spot on the best-seller list last winter even before its official publication date, and a movie version of *Cave Bear* (starring Daryl Hannah, with a screenplay by John Sayles) has recently been released. In the era of "Rambo," Auel has given us a resourceful, *female* superhero.

She is Ayla, a prehistoric Cro-Magnon woman who is orphaned as a small child by an earthquake. Ayla, wandering alone, gets mauled by a cave lion before she is rescued by the Clan—a group of Neanderthals who also inhabited Europe during the Ice Age more than 25,000 years ago. The Cro-Magnons are the precursors of modern Europeans, and Ayla is tall, blue-eyed, and blond. The Neanderthals are short and swarthy, with no chins, ridges over their eyebrows, and flat heads; they accept Ayla—one of the group they call the Others—only with difficulty. In their eyes, she is ugly.

*Clan of the Cave Bear* portrays Ayla's life in the Clan, which is rigid and harsh for a girl of her spirit. Women are forbidden to hunt (although Ayla learns in secret and becomes an expert); they are taught to be submissive and required to do anything any man tells them, including putting out sexually, anytime and anywhere. (When Ayla refuses Broud, one of the Clan men, she is raped.) People of the Clan produce no art, have no spoken language (although they do communicate in sign language and have ritual storytelling and movements not unlike dance), and are physically unable to laugh or weep; they can't even learn anything new, unless their ancestors have already done it, since their brains are based not on adaptation but on racial memory (Auel's fictional theory of why the Neanderthals died out). When people need to know something about a plant or animal, they don't learn, they "remember" what their ancestors knew—and over time, male and female brains have become so differentiated that men, for example, genuinely can't "remember" how to cook. Religion is also restricted to males (and in one scene, the men ritually eat the brains of a slain Clan hero). While there are some loving (and beautifully drawn) individuals in the Clan, Ayla never entirely learns to fit in. Eventually, as a teenager, she is cast out and cursed—for the sin of talking back to the male leader, the man who raped her, and by whom she consequently has a child from whom her exile separates her.



*Valley of the Horses* tells the story of how Ayla survives alone for several years (during which time she tames a wild horse and a cave lion, and together they become a kind of family unit), but she ultimately encounters a man of the Others, Jondalar (also tall, blue-eyed, and blond). Through him she meets others of her own kind. *The Mammoth Hunters* is about one such tribe Jondalar and Ayla attach themselves to for a time. The Others worship the Great Earth Mother, regard rape as a sacrilege, and allow women to hunt. (Jondalar even knows how to cook, although he doesn't do it very often; he also knows how to give Ayla sexual pleasure for the first time in her life—although the 20th century feminist reader might observe that her clitoris only figures in "fore-play.") Ayla, meanwhile, seems to excel at virtually everything—hunting, healing, practical science (she invents the flint firelighter, the stitching of wounds, the threaded needle, and a special double-stone slingshot, among other things), spirituality, languages, toolmaking, sewing, cooking. She also discovers that the Others find her uncommonly beautiful. Her only problem in her dealings with Jondalar and the Others is their horror when they realize that she was raised by "flatheads"—in their view, subhuman animals. But Ayla refuses to renounce the people who saved her life.

Beyond giving us a strong female character, Auel's books are rich in technical details. We learn about the plants that an Ice Age medicine woman might use to cure different ills, how to build an earthlodge out of mammoth bones and skins, how to knap flint, how to use mashed animal brains and stale human urine to process soft, white leather, and much, much more. Auel is famous as a researcher, and she gleaned some of her survival lore firsthand on field trips into the wilds of her native Pacific North-west, where she slept in an ice cave, hunted, made arrowheads, and learned to start a fire without matches. (The author—who had five children before she was 25, went from clerical work to earning an M.B.A., and wrote her first novel when she was over 40—is something of a superwoman herself.)

And yet despite all that's positive and riveting and informative about the books, I found them problematic. Like Scarlett O'Hara and the women in Ayn Rand's novels, Ayla is, alas, a great female character who comes with some cumbersome baggage.

First of all, Auel's research into the artifacts and the ecology of the Ice Age is so first-rate that it's easy to lose sight of the fact that the rest of the story—the human relationships—is speculative fiction. At the root of what's troublesome, I suspect, is Auel's decision to make the Others as much "like us" as possible, in everything from their speech patterns to their humor to their family lives. "These men aren't that much different from your sons or your college roommates," Auel told *People*. According to another interview in *Publishers Weekly*, "I tried to show that [Jondalar and his brother Thonolan] are thoroughly modern in their emotional responses, their intelligence, their psychological reactions. Anything we allow ourselves, we have to allow them." In fact, Jondalar and his brother sit around the cave talking what we would call thoroughly modern locker-room talk. ("*Markeno is right,*" *Carlono* said. "*Never take [the river] for granted. This river can find some unpleasant ways to remind you to pay attention to her*" [*Thonolan replies:*] "*I know some women like that, don't you, Jondalar?*").



The margins of my books are marked with dozens of similar examples of modern sexual and domestic assumptions which, when transplanted wholesale into the Ice Age, take on the nature of eternal human verities. Although nobody knows how babies are made (and although the tribe as a whole is the key survival unit), most characters pair off Noah's Ark style and form nuclear families. (A boy whose mother is single "needs a man around"□although, in fact there are lots of men a few feet away at the next hearth.) In every tribe of the Others, women have one kind of name (say a name ending with an *a*) and men have another. Among Jondalar's people, even though girls and women are allowed to hunt if they wish, only boys become men after their first kill; girls become women after they lose their virginity. Among all the tribes, Jondalar explains to Ayla, people believe that if a man of the Others rapes a Clan woman it's "not approved, but overlooked. [But] for a woman to 'share pleasures' with a flathead male is unforgivable ... [an abomination]." (Sound familiar?)

My objection isn't necessarily that such things couldn't possibly have been true, but that there's no evidence that they were, and they often seem particularly illogical in the woman-centered cultures Auel has created. Thus, whenever Auel falls into sex-roles-as-usual, she's exercising a *choice*□ and it's no more imaginative than the guys who put 1950s suburbanites in a cave and invented the Flint-stones. Her Others really tell us more about ourselves than about Cro-Magnon people; indeed, Ayla is in many ways a projection of the 1980s' female ideal□a woman who brings home the bison and fries it.

The fact that the Others are so much "like us" also inform and complicates another problem□the books' subtle racism. I say "subtle" here to distinguish a different point from the more obvious Aryan blond superiority bias, although it should also be noted in fairness that a dark-skinned half-African Cro-Magnon character figures prominently in the newest book. (Unfortunately, he's cut off from African culture, having been adopted by the Others at an early age, and his blackness is merely something that looks nice next to white fox fur clothing□or Ay la's white skin.)

But more subtly, if Auel had made the Others less familiar we might have seen their conflicts with the Clan from a genuine historical perspective. As it is, although we know that the Others are wrong□ that the members of the Clan *aren't* subhuman□ the equation is rigged so that we automatically identify with the Others (who, we also know, are the ultimate evolutionary winners). The message that emerges is a kind of post-colonialist chauvinist liberalism: people "like us" can be secure enough in our historic destiny to tolerate "less evolved" cultures. In the new book, the character who is the only representative of the Clan is a sickly, doomed half-Clan child who reminds Ayla of the son she has lost and who needs her protection against discrimination. The character is sympathetic, but I think his sickliness is rigged. As a white North American I feel I'm already programmed to view "primitives" not as true equals, but as the inevitable "victims of progress." This character does not challenge such liberal smugness in any way.

I certainly wouldn't want Auel to provide us with Ice Age black militants or politically correct Cro-Magnon men who do exactly half the cave-work, but I do wish she'd allow us some ancestors who *aren't* like our college roommates, for better or worse. In fact, I





thought Auel was at her best with the Clan and with other "exotic" characters whom she perhaps doesn't expect her average reader to "relate" to. In *Horses* we meet the Shamud, a Cro-Magnon healer and religious leader who is so androgynous that Jondalar honestly can't determine his/her gender. We later learn that people like the Shamud are always channeled into the tribe's priesthood, where they suffer a certain loneliness, but are compensated by respect and knowledge. "It is not easy to be different," the Shamud explains. "But it doesn't matter—the destiny is yours. There is no other place for one who carries the essence of both man and woman in one body." This isn't exactly the stuff of liberation, but what's wonderful and convincing about Shamud is that s/he doesn't resemble any gay man, lesbian, or transsexual you've ever met; s/he is instead a logical product of a particular culture, familiar enough to be human but magically alien in a way that the singlesbars heterosexual characters aren't.

Auel has promised three more novels in the series. I hope that in them she'll perhaps be able to

balance our present-day need for strong female characters with the genuine mysteries and complexities of the past.

**Source:** Lindsay Van Gelder, "Speculative Fiction," *inMs.*, Vol. XIV, No. 9, March 1986, pp. 64, 70.



## Critical Essay #4

*In the essay below, Wood examines the psychological development of Auel's protagonist in the author's first two novels. She also suggests that, in spite of the strong romantic overtones of the plots, the story is a classic adventure.*

By its very nature, speculative fiction has great potential to explore variations in patterns of human interaction. Jean M. Auel, in *The Clan of the Cave Bear* (1980) and its sequel *The Valley of Horses*, demonstrates how such fiction can delve into basic human problems. Set in the Ice Age near the Black Sea, the novels trace the growth and perseverance through adversity of its adolescent female protagonist. The author gives careful attention to detail and thus creates a believable portrait of the distant past. Nonetheless, the remote settings do not obscure the fact that the main character is a young woman, Ayla, caught in an essentially male-oriented world, striving for independence and self-respect. The novels question narrow definitions of masculinity and femininity to arrive at new answers which have implications for today's society.

Auel's main character represents a relatively new type of protagonist for the adventure story, the female hero. The main character of the adventure genre is traditionally male. John G. Cawelti contrasts this kind of formulaic literature with its masculine main characters to the romance which features female characters:

The central fantasy of the adventure story is that of the hero overcoming obstacles and dangers and accomplishing some important moral mission. . . . The feminine equivalent of the adventure story is the romance. . . . The crucial defining characteristic of romance is not that it stars a female but that its organizing action is the development of a love relationship. . . . Because this is the central line of development, the romance differs from the adventure story. Adventure stories, more often than not, contain a love interest, but one distinctly subsidiary to the hero's triumph over dangers and obstacles.

The woman protagonist in Auel's novels faces the challenge of the wilderness and survives, conforming to the pattern expected of the male hero in adventure tales. Love remains secondary to heroic action. Ayla is not a heroine of romance, but, rather, a true hero. In her study of heroines in English novels, Rachel M. Brownstein suggests that being a heroine necessitates a plot which ends in marriage:

The marriage plot most novels depend on is about finding validation of one's uniqueness and importance by being singled out among all other women by a man. The man's love is proof of the girl's value, and payment for it. Her search for perfect love through an incoherent, hostile wilderness of days is the plot that endows the aimless (life) with aim. Her quest is to be recognized in *all* her significance, to have her worth made real by being approved. When, at the end, this is done, she is transformed: her outward shape reflects her inner self, she is a bride, the very image of a heroine.

Ayla does not seek external validation by men but instead actively initiates the direction of the narrative without waiting for a man to take charge. She acts courageously without





regard for her own safety. She not only protects children (an acceptable role for a woman), but in several instances she saves the lives of men. The creation of a female hero thus necessitates allowing the woman to assume the active, dominant role of rescuer expected in adventure fiction.

In addition to her heroic actions, Ayla possesses inherent skills which are generally associated with men. She is not passing through a "tomboy" stage, but has talents and inclinations of the opposite sex which create tension with the rest of the social order. Ayla is a *Homo sapien* adopted into a Neanderthal clan. The dexterity of her species makes her a natural hunter, an activity taboo to women of her adopted clan. Hunting is proscribed to women although it is actively encouraged for males as behavior extremely important to the survival of the group. The designation by the Neanderthals of certain behaviors as appropriate only to men runs contrary to Ayla's talents. Expression of her "masculine" nature and skill is repressed by society, resulting in a sense of personal alienation and eventually provoking rebellion. According to Auel's fictional account. Neanderthal women are expressly forbidden to touch weapons.

Nonetheless, Ayla teaches herself to use a sling and even invents the technique of firing two rocks in rapid succession. The challenge of the hunt beckons irresistibly despite the fact that she can show no one her kill. While outwardly seeming to conduct herself as a passive female, she secretly violates the norm of the clan. Single-minded adherence to pursuing an activity unacceptable to her sex characterizes this protagonist, and the reader is expected to perceive her tenacity as a positive trait. While she conforms in public, she does not allow others to decide what she must do in private and eventually breaks out of the rigidly narrow sex role assigned to her.

The development of these masculine pursuits results in an increase not only in Ayla's physical strength but also in her self-esteem. When Ayla masters hunting with a sling, her whole demeanor changes without her realizing it: "She didn't know there was freedom in her step, an unconscious carryover from roaming the forests and fields: pride in her bearing, from learning a difficult skill and doing it better than someone else; and a growing self-confidence in her mien." The transformation sets her apart from members of her own sex and causes her to be described in masculine terms: "As her hunting skill grew, she developed an assurance and sinewy grace unknown to Clan women. She had the silent walk of the experienced hunter, a tight muscular control of her young body, a confidence in her own reflexes and a far-seeing look in her eye." This muscular tone and development is alien to the traditional romantic heroine who never needs a muscle of her own. It is possible to see in Ayla's athletic body the new feminine ideal of the 1980s with its emphasis on participation in sports and even bodybuilding.

Male characters in the clan perceive this "masculine" female as a threat and react savagely. Auel explains how tradition calls for Neanderthal women to accept the sexual advances of any adult male of the group. Broud, a sadistic Neanderthal man who delights in repeatedly raping Ayla in the most brutal manner, embodies the resentments of the men. Dominance over the young woman forms an essential ingredient in their relationship: "Broud reveled in his newfound dominance over Ayla and used her often.. .. After a time, it was no longer painful, but Ayla detested it. And it was her hatred



that Broud enjoyed. He had put her in her place, gained superiority over her, and finally found a way to make her react to him. It didn't matter that her response was negative, he preferred it. He wanted to see her cower, to see her fear, to see her force herself to submit". The anger directed by men toward her does not result in eliminating the offensive masculine inclinations or talents. Rather, it actually brings about the opposite effect, and instead of being broken into submission and passivity, Ayla is strengthened by this cruel treatment and becomes even more masculine. She undergoes stages in the life of the typical male hero, including an initiation trial similar to a male puberty rite. When Ayla uses a sling in front of clan members to save a child from a predator, she reacts instinctively without regard for possible consequences to her. The wise clan leader resolves the dilemma of an appropriate punishment for her heroic but unpardonable behavior by reducing the customary sentence to a month-long "death curse." She survives this test despite a harrowing experience in a blizzard.

As a result, the clan accepts her into the ranks of hunters and her totem is symbolically marked on her thigh as would be the case with a young man at puberty. After the ceremony, the clan celebrates with the customary feast. Lest she forget her proper place, the men of the clan are careful to point out that hunting is the only male prerogative which Ayla may pursue. The leader states: "Ayla, you have made your first kill; you must now assume the responsibilities of an adult. But you are a woman, not a man, and you will be a woman always, in all ways but one. You may use only a sling, Ayla, but you are now the Woman Who Hunts". Through her courageous persistence, she earns the right to assume a male persona and enjoys increased opportunities.

The ending of *The Clan of the Cave Bear* clearly delineates Ayla's "masculine" courage and defiance as contrasted with Broud's "feminine" impulsiveness. His leadership ability and judgment are questioned. One of Broud's first acts as leader is to banish Ayla forever with a permanent "death curse," but instead of ignoring her after the curse is performed, he raises his fist in fury to her, an act of acknowledgment. Even his father realizes Broud's lack of character and gives the ultimate insult, that Ayla is more of a man than Broud is: "You still don't understand, do you? You acknowledged her, Broud, she has beaten you. She's dead, and still she won. She was a woman, and she had more courage than you, Broud, more determination, more self-control. She was more man than you are. Ayla should have been the son of my mate." There could be no harsher reproach in a society with such rigid sex-role expectations than for a man to be unfavorably compared to a woman.

The social organization of the clan fails to provide flexibility for exceptional members. Neanderthal groups, according to Auel's narrative, function because of proscribed roles maintained through racial memory. Despite inherent differences in the species, Ayla adjusts to clan life and lives happily as long as the clan has a tolerant leader. Her very nature as a *Homo sapien* arouses intense hatred in Broud and, when he finally receives power in the closing pages of the novel, she is unjustly expelled from the group. Ayla wanders northward alone, seeking others of her kind. *The Clan of the Cave Bear* ends with her being cursed and forced to leave the clan. The sequel begins with her arduous and lonely search for a new life. The plot thus advances from conflicts within society to



survival alone in a hostile wilderness. Ayla's great physical stamina, her tenacity, and her basic intelligence make her story credible and her survival possible.

In *The Valley of Horses* Ayla's relationships with animals prove more satisfying than with people. She lives happily for four years with a mare and a cave lion which she raises from orphans and tames to the point where they accompany her on the hunt and allow her to ride them. This relationship between the protagonist and a horse has an erotic edge. Although she is not ignorant of the basic mechanics of sexuality, she has never felt profound yearnings. The rut of Ayla's mare provokes strange feelings in the woman which she does not understand, since sexuality among the Neanderthals is limited to the male's "relieving his needs" with the female. Ayla is distressed when her mare follows her sexual urges and freely joins a wild stallion, but since the horse, like the cave lion, is not her possession, she realizes that the mare is free to depart at will to join her own kind. In fact, Ayla envies the horse's good fortune. While the animals do not remain constantly with the young woman, they prove good companions in an otherwise lonely environment.

Whereas Ayla has certain characteristics of a male hero, she remains profoundly female. For instance, her great strength does not change her basic biological makeup. Monthly cycles still occur, and leather straps fulfill sanitary needs during menstruation. Ayla excels in traditional feminine handiwork, spending her spare time making exquisite baskets and learning how to sew. She clearly sees herself as the female in potential sexual situations with men. This heterosexual orientation remains constant throughout the novel regardless of her experiences with male brutality. She wants to find a mate/husband and raise children, but the difference between her and the typical romantic heroine is that Ayla simultaneously can accept both masculine and feminine aspects of her androgynous being. The fact that she can become a mother, for instance, does not preclude her from riding horses or hunting.

Ayla's isolation is a necessary step in allowing her to develop a more balanced sense of herself which eventually leads to her successful reintegration into a less repressive society. The changes in attitudes and experiences brought about by her separation from the group in which she was raised produce a new outlook for Ayla. The injustice she suffered as a sex object does not, however, cause her to reject all men. Indeed, the novels are *bildungsromans* exploring Ayla's nascent sexuality and her search for a meaningful relationship with a sympathetic man. She does not become sexually awakened until finding a compatible human partner in *The Valley of Horses*. She finally encounters a man who takes for granted that women hunt and make tools and that men help with food gathering and preserving. Mutual respect and admiration sparks affection between the two characters. The novel ends with the meeting of a human group, a signal of Ayla's entry into a new social order. She manages to have it all— independence and companionship—the fantasy of the modern American woman.

While Auel creates in these novels an active and heroic female figure grappling with tensions between her basic nature and her society, she also presents the difficulties males have adjusting socially. *The Valley of Horses* introduces a male protagonist, Jondalar, whose story is followed in chapters alternating with Ayla's adventures until the



two finally meet and Ayla saves his life. Naturally, they fall in love. One might even say that the man's tale is the romance, since following Cawelti's definition, his preoccupation is with finding the ideal woman whereas Ayla struggles to survive and passes tests of bravery typical of the adventure story. Jondalar accompanies his brother on a journey. He would have preferred to stay at home. He serves as a companion rather than initiating action on his own as does Ayla. While he is proficient in the act of love, he does not know how to risk loving until he finds Ayla. One woman who loves him points out that he may be destined for an especially strong woman: "Maybe you haven't found the right woman. Maybe the Mother has someone special for you. She doesn't make many like you. You are really more than most women could bear. If all your love were concentrated on one, it could overwhelm her, if she wasn't one to whom the Mother gave equal gifts. Even if you did love me I'm not sure I could live with it. If you loved a woman as much as you love your brother, she would have to be very strong." In the Ice Age world Auel creates, neither men nor women are exempt from difficulties. The author rejects the idea of dominance by either of the sexes in favor of freedom of all people.

These popular novels reflect the author's optimism regarding the resolution of the difficult problems of individual choice which plague contemporary society. Just as Ayla is isolated, present day women all too often find themselves with no role models and no positive support from society as they attempt to function in today's world. While the situation of the Ice Age is different from our own, the solutions worked out in speculative fiction mirror those that must be worked out in lives of twentieth-century women. The success of these two books as popular fiction stems from the appeal of the strength of the female hero and the positive ending to her story.

The difficulty of integrating personal and professional life can be especially challenging in a complex society. William S. Barnbridge suggests a possible effect on present society of Sword-and-Sorcery novels which applies just as well to other novels of speculative fiction such as Auel's: "While Sword-and-Sorcery imagines fantastic worlds, the analysis of alternate ascribed roles and family structures it offers may contribute indirectly to create innovation in our own society." Speculative fiction leads the way for new patterns of human interaction. In this manner, literature posits and tests creative approaches to human dilemmas, working out theoretical cases to be either accepted or rejected by the evolving social order.

**Source:** Diane S. Wood, "Female Heroism in the Ice Age: Jean Auel's *Earth Children*," in *Extrapolation*, Vol. 27, No. 1, Spring 1986, pp. 33-38.

# Adaptations

*The Clan of the Cave Bear* was made into a feature film directed by Michael Chapman, scripted by John Sayles, and starring Pamela Reed as Iza and Daryl Hannah as Ayla in 1986. The film was a popular and critical failure.



## Topics for Further Study

Research the anthropological and archeological evidence about the origins and the extinction of the Neanderthals and compare the scientific evidence with the way Auel portrays the Clan's physical and cultural appearance. Is Auel's portrayal accurate?

After investigating different kinds of religious ceremonies, including ritual cannibalism and Native-American ceremonies, compare these religions to those Auel describes in her novels.

Using contemporary feminist literary theory, discuss Ayla as a feminist heroine.

Auel provides a considerable amount of technical material in *The Clan of the Cave Bear* about flint-knapping, arrowhead making, medicinal plants, and leather tanning. After trying out Auel's directions, describe the experience. Were the directions easy and accurate?

## What Do I Read Next?

*The Valley of the Horses* is the 1982 sequel to *The Clan of the Cave Bear*. The story follows Ayla after she leaves the Clan. Auel's second sequel, *The Mammoth Hunters*, was published in 1985. This novel deals much more with the interpersonal relationships than any technical information or physical and cultural descriptions. *The Plains of Passage* (1990) is the next book in the series.

Naomi Miller Stokes brings Native-American legends into the modern era in her 1996 novel, *The Tree People*. Jordan Tidewater, a Native-American sheriff in Oregon, must solve a bizarre string of murders that seems to involve the spirit of an evil shaman buried alive one thousand years ago.

*The People of Wolf* and its five sequels, written by W. Michael Gear and Kathleen O'Neale Gear, trace the history of the first Americans who follow a young warrior inspired by the spirit of the wolf. Many reviewers rate it as high or higher than Auel's series.

*Introducing Anthropology*, edited by James Hayes and James Henslin (1975), is a standard collection of essays on anthropology as a science and cultural activity. The readings include essays by Margaret Mead, George Gaylord Simpson, Robert Adams, and Dorothy Lee.

James Shreeve's *The Neanderthal Enigma* (1996) is a remarkably readable history of the Neanderthal people. Shreeve makes use of the latest research and presents many of the problems readers have with the image of the Neanderthal as created by Hollywood and writers like Auel. The book includes pictures and drawings of actual Neanderthal artifacts.



## Further Study

Graham, Sandy, "Making Mammoth Best Sellers," Interview, in *USA Today*, October 12, 1990, p. 6.

Auel shares her views on the Ice Age and on being a writer in this candid and personal interview.

Harrington, Maureen, "Jean Auel's Improbable Story Upstages Her Own Books," in *The Denver Post*, December 5, 1990, p. 1.

In this interview, Auel talks about her early life, how she started writing, and how the success of the *Earth's Children* Series has changed her life.

Hornblower, Margot, "Queen of the Ice Age Romance," Interview, in *Time Magazine*, Vol. 136, October 22, 1990, p.

QQ

**55.**

Hornblower interviews Auel about her life, literary success, and how she sees her work in relation to history and literature.

Pisik, Betsy, "The Mammoth Huntress and Her Prehistoric Gold Mine," in *The Washington Times*, November 20, 1990, Sec. E, p. 1. A standard profile of Auel's literary success, but a satirical look at how authors sell out for material gain.





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Wilcox, Clyde, "The Not-So-Failed Feminism of Jean Auel," in *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 28, No. 3, Winter 1994, pp. 63-70.



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## **Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Book**

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels



frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

### Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

### How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

### Other Features

NfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

### Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

### We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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