

Serena Study Guide

Serena by Ron Rash

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Plot Summary

Serena by Ron Rash is set in North Carolina during the Depression. It is the story of Serena, a greedy timber baroness who will stop at nothing to achieve her goals. Serena and her husband, George Pemberton, take on the government in an attempt to stall the national park movement in order to continue logging the land. Serena's obsession with Pemberton and her desire for power lead her to threaten the lives of Pemberton's one-time lover and her illegitimate son.

As the novel begins, Serena arrives in North Carolina for the first time shortly after meeting and marrying George Pemberton. When the two arrive at the train station, they are met by Abe Harmon and his pregnant daughter, Rachel. Harmon threatens Pemberton with a knife and Serena encourages Pemberton to kill the man. Serena then hands Rachel Harmon's pearl-handled knife and advises her to sell it since she'll be getting nothing more from Pemberton.

When Serena arrives at the lumber camp, Pemberton introduces her to the workers and instructs them to follow her orders as they would his own. Serena proves her knowledge of the timber industry by challenging Bilded, a foreman, to out-guess her on the board feet of a large tree. When Serena wins, the workers begin to attribute all sorts of mythical qualities to the unconventionally beautiful Serena.

Harris arrives at the camp and discusses the national park movement with the Pembertons. Like them, he opposes the creation of a national park. Pemberton plans to partner with Harris to purchase a new lumber tract. Serena expresses a desire to begin logging in Brazil.

Rachel gives birth to a son whom she names Jacob. She continues to live in her father's cabin and cares for the farm on her own. She is very poor and sells her animals to pay for the things she and Jacob need.

Serena has an eagle delivered to camp that she trains to hunt and kill snakes on the logging job. When the eagle is trained, she rides around the logging job on her enormous Arabian horse with the eagle perched on one arm, leading the men to spread ever wilder tales about her mythical qualities.

Rachel comes to the camp and asks for a job. Pemberton asks Serena's permission to employ her and Serena tells him he must be the one to offer the job and that he must make it clear to her that she has no claim on Pemberton. Rachel is treated poorly by the other women working at the camp because of her affair with Pemberton, but Joel Vaughn, a young man she went to school with, continues to treat her well.

A national park delegation arrives at camp to speak with the Pembertons. Serena senses their partner, Buchanan, is wavering in his loyalty to them. She instructs Pemberton to take Buchanan hunting the next day. During the hunt, Pemberton



"accidentally" shoots Buchanan in the back. Sheriff McDowell does not believe it was an accident, but cannot prove it.

Serena becomes pregnant and continues to ride around the work site keeping her pregnancy hidden from the workers. However, when Galloway's hand is cut off in an accident, Serena jumps from her horse to save his life and reveals her condition. Galloway is certain he will live because his mother prophesied he would be injured and saved by a woman who he would be bound to serve for the rest of his life.

The Pembertons and Harris check out a tract of land in Jackson County and Harris is adamant that they purchase that piece of land rather than another they'd been considering. He threatens to refuse to partner with the Pembertons if he doesn't get his way. Serena allows the Jackson County purchase, but puts in the contract that Harris cannot mine there until they are done logging the land.

Serena loses the baby she is carrying when she begins having stomach pains. Doctor Cheney misdiagnoses her. As a result, Galloway kills Cheney. The Pembertons pay off law officials to leave the murder unsolved. Serena is unable to have more children. She returns to work soon after the loss of the baby and the workers are deeper in awe at a woman who survived such an ordeal.

Meanwhile, Pemberton begins to take interest in his and Rachel's son Jacob. He notices how much the child looks like him. He has a picture of Jacob, which he compares to a picture of himself as a child.

Campbell, the honest foreman who had been instrumental in running the logging camp, deserts the camp. Serena has Galloway track him down and kill him for his lack of loyalty.

The Pembertons meet potential investors at a dinner party at the Biltmore Estate. Serena sells them on the idea of investing in her Brazil venture. At the party, they discover Harris was tricked into thinking the Jackson County land was rich in precious gems. Serena is angry and instructs Galloway to kill Harris in spite of Pemberton's protests.

Serena then sends Galloway after Rachel and Jacob. Pemberton is upset by this and begins to drink more. McDowell is tipped off by Joel Vaughn about the impending murder and takes Rachel from her cabin before Galloway gets there. Galloway murders Rachel's neighbor, Widow Jenkins. When McDowell questions Pemberton about the murder, Pemberton insists Serena had nothing to do with it. But, when McDowell leaves, he takes his hunting knife out of a drawer and discovers it's covered in still damp blood. He wipes the blade and puts it back. Later, he gives McDowell a great deal of money and instructs him to give it to Rachel. He doesn't want to know where she is. McDowell helps Rachel escape the area and instructs Joel Vaughn to get on the next freight train. McDowell is fired from his job as sheriff and the Pembertons have a man they can bribe hired in his place.



Rachel goes to Kingsport where she stays for a time. McDowell tells her he will continue to pursue the Pembertons even though he's been fired. When Rachel sees Galloway in Kingsport she escapes on a freight train and ends up in Knoxville. She calls McDowell and he tells her to take the first train out of there. McDowell sets fire to the Pembertons' house, but they escape and see him sitting outside the burning building with an empty kerosene can. He is arrested.

Rachel arrives in Seattle, Washington where she believes Vaughn will have gone. She gets a job at a café. The owners are kind people who feed her and allow her to bring Jacob to work with her.

Serena throws a thirtieth birthday party for Pemberton. She arranges for Galloway's mother to provide entertainment at the party by telling the futures of the party guests. Serena tells Pemberton to ask Mrs. Galloway how he will die. Mrs. Galloway tells him it will take more than one thing to kill him.

The next day Pemberton goes out hunting with Galloway. Galloway feeds him a sandwich that Serena laced with rat poison. He then instructs Pemberton to crawl up on a ridge. Pemberton is bitten by a snake and falls. Galloway cuts the bite to release the poison, but Pemberton knows he cuts too deeply. Galloway then reveals to Pemberton that Serena instructed him to kill Pemberton because she knows he helped Rachel to escape. He tells Pemberton he tortured information out of McDowell before killing him, but McDowell never did give up Rachel's location. Galloway leaves Pemberton to die in the woods.

The novel closes with a coda set in 1975. Serena is in Brazil where she has been a successful timber baroness for many years. She has a picture of her and Pemberton hanging on her wall. Rachel, who is in the hospital awaiting a heart surgery, reads an article about Serena in a magazine. She tears the article out and shows it to Jacob. The next month, Jacob travels to South America where he kills both Galloway and Serena. A man who witnesses the event swears he saw the man from Serena's picture standing behind her as she died.



Part 1: Chapters 1-3

Summary

Serena, by Ron Rash, is the story of Serena, an unconventional and cutthroat businesswoman, her husband, Pemberton, and their quest to dominate the 1930's lumber industry. Serena is a story of obsessive love, greed, and the beginnings of environmental awareness in America.

As Chapter 1 begins, Pemberton has just returned from North Carolina with his new bride, Serena. The two are met on the train platform by a drunken man, Harmon, and his daughter, who is pregnant with Pemberton's child. Pemberton's partners, Buchanan and Wilkie, are also there to meet them. Serena is unlike most women of her time. She is sun-tanned, has short hair, and shakes hands firmly.

Serena approaches Harmon who has been watching them and Harmon says he has business with Pemberton. A group of Boston Lumber employees looks on as the encounter takes place. Harmon pulls out a bowie knife and threatens Pemberton, who tries to avoid the fight by urging the young woman to take her father home. Serena tells Pemberton to get his knife and settle the matter. Pemberton stabs and kills Harmon with his hunting knife. Serena picks Harmon's bowie knife up and hands it to his daughter telling her to sell it because she'll never get anything else from Pemberton or Serena. Pemberton is glad his men were watching because he believes they will respect him and Serena even more now that they know he can kill a man.

Sheriff McDowell arrives and insists Pemberton go to the Sheriff's office. The two men clearly dislike one another. When he returns they drive to camp. They are met at their house by Joel Vaughn. Their house is simple, which pleases Serena who would rather they spent their money buying more timber tracts to log. She's glad, also, that the men live in Spartan conditions since she thinks it makes them work harder.

As Serena tends to a cut on Pemberton's arm from the knife fight, he thinks about the first time he met Serena. Mrs. Lowell, the hostess of the party where they met, warned him about Serena. Serena finishes caring for his arm and undresses. Pemberton is struck again by her unconventional beauty.

Chapter 2 picks up the next day and Pemberton introduces Serena to the camp's workers. He tells the workers that Serena knows the business and they are to follow her orders as they would his own.

Serena challenges Bilded, a foreman, to estimate the total board feet of a tree and she will do the same. If he wins, Bilded will receive an extra two weeks' pay and if he loses he works for two weeks free. He accepts the challenge. While the tree is cut and measured, Serena rides her Arabian horse around the work site.



Pemberton watches her as she rides and is awed by her beauty. He recalls a conversation between some women who discussed Serena's arrival at the finishing school where she was educated. She'd been arrogant and unlike the other girls. Pemberton knows little about Serena's past because Serena rarely talks about it. However, she has bad dreams at night.

Harris arrives and he and Pemberton discuss the movement to create a national park, which could affect their business. They are opposed to the park. They make plans to look at a lumber tract the next day. When Harris leaves, Pemberton rides out to find Serena. She is having lunch with some of the workers who express their respect for her knowledge of logging. Pemberton recalls a day in Boston when he'd asked Serena her plans for the future and she'd said they should begin logging in Brazil.

That evening the workers gather in front of the office to learn the results of the wager. Among them are Snipes, Stewart, McIntyre, and Reverend Bolick. McIntyre, a self-proclaimed theologian, refers to Serena as "the whore of Babylon" when he sees her because she's wearing pants. Serena is declared the winner of the wager.

After the announcement, Pemberton, Serena, Doctor Cheney, Buchanan, and Wilkie sit down for a drink together. They talk about Serena's past and the death of her family in a flu epidemic. Serena says the doctor at the time said she survived because she refused to die. They also talk about Kephart, a local author who supports the national park plan.

Campbell later asks Pemberton if they will hold Bilded to the bet since he has a wife and two children. Serena says they will because that will make it an even better lesson for the other workers. She says Bilded is to remain on as foreman for the next two weeks and then be fired.

In Chapter 3, the focus shifts to Rachel Harmon who has given birth to Pemberton's child and named him Jacob. Rachel takes the baby to Widow Jenkins's house so that she can go into town to sell her horse and cow.

As she travels, Rachel sees a car coming and momentarily hopes it is Pemberton coming to set things right for her, but it's not him. She remembers how Pemberton had taken notice of her when she worked at the camp. She'd been very young and Pemberton was the first man she'd kissed. She remembers that both Joel Vaughn and Campbell had tried to warn her away from Pemberton.

Rachel arrives at the general store and talks to the storekeeper about purchasing her animals. They agree that he will pick them up on the weekend and he pays her for the animals. As she walks on, Sherriff McDowell calls out to her. He asks how she and the baby are and she says they are well.

Rachel then stops at the stone mason's to talk about her father's headstone. Surratt, the stone mason, accepts a saddle as payment. Rachel plans to drag the stone home with her, but Surratt says he'll bring it to her in his truck and place it for her as well. By the time she gets home, Surratt has already placed the headstone. Rachel stands by the stone and remembers the blue satin bedspread her mother had and how her father had



burned it on the day her mother had left. She remembers how her father did his best to teach her how to run the farm and a time when he'd called her into the barn to see a pretty moth.

Rachel believes that the secret to getting over loss is not to remember, but to forget. She reminds herself not to love Jacob because he could be taken away.

Analysis

The book begins with the introduction of the story's protagonist, Serena. While she is the character around whom the novel centers, she is certainly not a hero, but an antihero. The reader's first glimpse of Serena is as she steps off the train wearing pants and boots instead of a dress as would be expected of women in the late 1920's, which is the time period in which the book is set. Her skin is sun-tanned, her hair is short, and there are calluses on her hands. She is, from the outset, a bit of a mystery. The author does not provide many details of Serena's past, instead providing clues as to what her life may have been like without actually telling her story. The reader learns that her father was a lumberman like Pemberton and taught Serena the business. When her family died from a flu epidemic, Serena was placed in a finishing school at the age of 16. To this day she has nightmares, but the reader doesn't exactly know what the dreams are about, nor does Pemberton. The author intentionally maintains an air of mystery around Serena because she is, in many ways, a mystery to her husband as well and to the other characters of the story, too.

Serena is a flat character who is built around the characteristics of greed, hardness, and cruelty. She does not grow as a person, but instead descends into further darkness as the novel progresses. The reader learns early on that she is immersed in the lumber industry and has aspirations to take the lumber company to an international level by acquiring land in Brazil for logging. Serena is also obsessive about Pemberton. Her first action in the novel is to encourage her husband to kill Abe Harmon in front of their workers and Harmon's pregnant daughter. The act is meant to cement Pemberton's reputation among his employee's as a man they are to respect and even fear. It is also meant to show Harmon's daughter that Pemberton will have nothing further to do with her now that he is married to Serena.

From the outset, the author establishes Serena as a mythical creature. This is a motif that is carried out throughout the duration of the book. In a conversation that Pemberton once overheard between two women, Serena is described as having "just showed up one day" at the finishing school, as though she appeared out of thin air. The author also mentions in this section the arrival of Serena's white Arabian horse. The horse is described as having given Joel Vaughn a difficult time upon its arrival, and yet Serena calms the great beast with a few quiet words. The horse is symbolic of Serena's mythical nature and the power she has over other living things.

Serena's cruel way of doing business is introduced in the incident with Biled. She is determined to prove to the workers that she is as capable as any of them and is a



woman to be respected, which is what leads her to place the bet with Bilded. However, proving her knowledge of the lumber industry isn't enough for Serena — she must also prove that she is a woman to be feared and so arranges for Bilded to be fired after he fulfills his two weeks of free work. When Campbell points out that Bilded has a family to provide for, Serena thinks it's all the more reason to make an example of him.

Pemberton is revealed to be completely enamored with Serena. He is a man who enjoys a challenge, which is part of what drew him to Serena, a woman he was warned about. Like Serena, Pemberton is a ruthless businessman, although probably not quite to the level of Serena. He takes Serena on as an equal, which is unusual for the time period since she is a woman. In fact, Pemberton instructs his employees to view Serena as his equal and to take orders from her as they would from him. He is clearly proud of his wife and can hardly keep his eyes off her as she travels through the camp on her horse. He frequently marvels at her unconventional beauty and is in awe of her. In this way, Pemberton also seems to be under Serena's mythical thrall just like her horse. She is often able to quell Pemberton's misgivings with just her touch and a few words.

The other primary character who is introduced in this section is Rachel Harmon. Rachel is a young woman, only 17 years of age, who worked in the logging camp and found herself taken in by Pemberton's attentions. Having been very young at the time of the affair, Rachel believed herself to have been in love. The character of Rachel will prove to be the antithesis of the character of Serena. Where Serena is hard and ruthless, Rachel is kind and meek. The author further represents Rachel's meek character by not even naming her in the first two chapters. She is simply referred to as Harmon's daughter. She is wholly unimportant to either Pemberton or Serena.

When the focus of the novel shifts to Rachel in Chapter 3, the author reveals her name and details of her life. Unlike Serena, Rachel has grown up in relative poverty. Her mother left when she was a girl leaving Rachel to be raised by her alcoholic father. Her father taught her what she needed to know to care for the house and run the farm, but was ill-equipped to teach her what she'd one day need to know about raising a child. As a result, Serena relies on Widow Jenkins for advice and help in raising her son, Jacob.

Rachel is treated with kindness by many of the townspeople who seem to empathize with the difficult situation Pemberton has placed her in. For example, Sherriff McDowell sits with her after her father is killed. Later, as Rachel goes to sell her horse and cow, Sheriff McDowell stops her to ask how she and Jacob are fairing. Though he is only briefly introduced in this section, Sherriff McDowell will prove to be Serena's antagonist.

Rachel is also helped by Ludlow Surratt, the stone mason who makes her father's headstone. When Rachel is unable to pay for the stone, Surratt accepts a saddle as payment, then drives the stone out to Rachel's house and places it for her. This act of kindness is meant to show that Rachel is a likeable person who is worthy of the love and friendship of her neighbors.

Rachel recalls two things from her childhood in this section. The first is a blue satin bedspread that had belonged to her mother. She remembers helping her mother make



the bed with it and the cool, smooth feel of the satin. And, she remembers her father burning the bedspread after her mother left. The bedspread is a symbol of a better time in both Rachel and Abe Harmon's life. It represents a time when Rachel's mother was with them. When she leaves, Abe Harmon can't bear to look at it. Burning the bedspread is symbolic of forgetting the past, which is what Rachel believes is the key to getting over the sadness of the loss of people she has loved.

The other event that Rachel recalls is her father calling her into the barn to see a beautiful moth. Rachel recalls watching the moth fly out into the night and the touch of her father's hand on her shoulder. The author includes this detail to show the reader that even though Rachel's life was likely very difficult, she was raised with love and there were moments of beauty as well. Therefore, Rachel knows what it is to love and be loved.

The author cleverly sets up the action of the novel with just a few lines at the end of Chapter 3. He writes, "And now this brown-eyed child. Don't love it, Rachel told herself. Don't love anything that can be taken away." (Chapter 3, final paragraph) These two lines serve as a foreshadowing for the climax of the novel.

Discussion Question 1

How does the author establish Serena as different from most women of her day? What details does he provide about Serena?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Serena challenge Bilded? Why does she say to fire Bilded after two weeks? What does she believe this will show the employees of the lumber company?

Discussion Question 3

What is Rachel like? Why doesn't she have a name until the third chapter? How does the author show what Rachel is like through the way other characters interact with her?

Vocabulary

bluster, lieu, nuptials, implying, prosperous, conveyed, ascent, Spartan, conventionally, girth, albeit



Part 1: Chapters 4-6

Summary

In Chapter 4, Galloway, a man who has proven his worth as a hard worker is promoted to foreman in place of Bilded. Galloway is a convicted murderer, so Serena believes he'll be a man the man in the undisciplined work crew will fear him and work harder.

Serena is asked if she'll be returning to Colorado for the summer and she says she will not. Wilkie asks who looks after her parents' estate and Serena says she had the house burned and sold the timber holdings.

Pemberton goes to tell Galloway he has been promoted. Galloway lives with his mother who is blind and is believed to be psychic. Galloway isn't surprised by the promotion. As Pemberton walks back he thinks about how he first met Rachel when she'd brought him his dinner after he'd brought an injured worker home late in the evening. He wonders how far back in a chain of choices one could trace an event like his affair with Rachel and the birth of her child.

The next day a man is bitten by a rattlesnake while working. Wilkie complains that the snakes cost them money because men are injured and it makes the crews work slower for fear of being bitten. Serena agrees that they should be killed off.

Chapter 5 starts with the beginning of winter, which has come early. Snipes' crew is working on Noland Mountain and they talk about the early winter. Stewart mentions that his father told him the "wooly worms" had thicker coats and that was a sign of an early winter. McIntyre cautions him not to believe in pagan signs and says the unnatural weather is a sign that they are in the end times.

The conversation then turns to the proposed national park. Dunbar says his uncle's land was taken and he was told it was eminent domain. Ross says that the Pembertons and Harris will bribe local officials to prevent the park. Dunbar says that they won't be able to bribe Sherriff McDowell.

Finally, the men talk about the possibility of a panther in the forest and McIntyre says that lions are another sign of the pending apocalypse. Snipes argues that there could be a panther even if there have been no tangible signs because plenty of things exist that you can't see, like love and courage and darkness.

In Chapter 6, the Pembertons and Buchanan decide to go hunting in an area that Galloway has been baiting with corn and apples. Serena says she hopes they'll find the panther. Buchanan asks Galloway how he knows a recently found deer carcass wasn't killed by a panther. Galloway answers that a panther always eats the heart first and the deer's chest wasn't torn open. As they travel to the baited meadow, Pemberton smiles when he notices that Serena looks like she's riding on air because her Arabian blends



into the snow. He thinks about how the men have credited Serena with all sorts of powers since her bet with Bilded.

When the group talks about the stock market collapse and that it may badly affect the lumber industry, Serena comments that perhaps they'll be helped by a boost in the coffin industry since it seems there is a high demand for them on Wall Street. When Buchanan asks Pemberton a question and Serena goes to answer it, Buchanan says he was asking Pemberton, not her. Pemberton answers that his opinion is the same as his wife's.

The hunting party kills a dozen deer by late afternoon. As evening sets in, they hear the pack of hounds they brought with corner a bear. The bear attacks Pemberton and he presses himself into the bear's body to make it more difficult for the bear to hurt him. Then he feels a rifle against his side and the bear releases him when it is shot. The shot was fired by Serena and she places another one between the bear's eyes, killing it. Pemberton is not seriously hurt. Galloway comments that he's never seen a woman shoot a bear and Serena says Pemberton would have done the same for her. Galloway asks her if she's sure about that.

They leave the bear's carcass and all of the deer they have shot lying in the meadow in hopes they will draw mountain lions. Pemberton offers a gold piece as a reward for anyone who can lead him to the panther.

Pemberton and Serena ride back to camp together. Pemberton assures her that he would indeed have shot the bear for her. Serena says she's known that of him since the night they met.

Analysis

This section of the novel introduces yet another major character, Galloway. Galloway is described as a convicted murderer who lives with his psychic mother. The author establishes that rumors of Galloway's mother's abilities may indeed be true since he knows of his promotion before Pemberton arrives to inform him. Galloway is a man the other workers fear and he and his mother are treated with great deference. In Galloway, the author has created a character who is much like Serena. He is a bit of a mythical being to his fellow workers and his mother's other-worldly abilities help to enhance that perception. As the book progresses, he becomes almost a part of Serena who cleaves to her side until she sends him out to do her dirty work. After doing her bidding, he returns to her side.

Following Galloway's promotion, a worker dies due to a rattlesnake bite. This event foreshadows Serena's eventual solution to the problem in the form of an eagle she trains to hunt the snakes. The event also provides another look into Serena's psyche in that she says part of what makes the snakes so beautiful along with the intricate patterns on their skins is that they are also so dangerous. The author is suggesting that



Serena's venomous nature is part of what makes her attractive to Pemberton, and Serena is aware of it.

The theme of choice is also introduced in this section. Pemberton wonders about the chain of choices that has led him to where he is now, with a wife and an illegitimate child by Rachel. Specifically, he wonders if there is a chain of cause and effect at all or if one's life can be changed in a single moment by a single choice.

Chapter 5 focuses solely on a conversation between some of the workers, including McIntyre and Snipes. Though there was a brief conversation in the first section, it is in this section where an entire chapter is devoted to them that the author sets the workers up as a Greek chorus to comment on the happenings of the novel as well as provide some comic relief. McIntyre's commentary comes in the form of religious observations. In the previous section, he compared Serena to the whore of Babylon because she was wearing pants and said it was a sign foretold in the book of Revelations. In this section, he continues with his end-of-times talk by saying the early winter and a mountain lion in the area are also signs of the apocalypse. The conversation is comical because McIntyre is always a bit off the mark when it comes to Biblical references.

The men also talk about the national park and the conversation serves as evidence of their awareness of what is really going on. They know their employers are crooked business people and will bribe anyone they have to in order to keep their land from becoming part of the national park. They also point out that the Pembertons won't be able to bribe Sherriff McDowell, thus hinting that McDowell may be the true hero of this story.

Finally, when the men talk about the panther, they foreshadow some of the coming events of the novel. The panther symbolizes Serena and the darkness she has brought to the logging camp. During the hunt, Galloway remarks that a panther will always eat an animal's heart first, which is exactly what Serena will eventually do to Pemberton, figuratively speaking. During the workers' conversation in Chapter 5, Snipes argues that not being able to see something doesn't mean it doesn't exist. He concludes the conversation by saying that you also can't see darkness, but when it's around you, you know it. The darkness refers to Serena's evil. As of yet, the men have had no concrete evidence of just how bad things will get, but they can sense the impending darkness.

The hunt that Pemberton, Serena, Galloway, and Buchanan go on serves to illustrate the theme of the destruction of nature. The hunt does not take place out of a need for meat to feed the workers and their families, but simply as a sporting event. The deer and bear aren't so much as skinned. They are simply left in a heap in the meadow to rot and possibly attract a mountain lion so that Pemberton might have the thrill of shooting it.

The hunt also provides additional proof of Serena's cruel and mythical qualities. Her cruelty is shown through her acerbic comment that the stock market crash might help the lumber company since there is an increased need for coffins. This comment alludes to the high rate of suicides among Wall Street employees during the Depression. Her



mythical qualities are further explored in Pemberton's observation of the way she appears to be riding on air when her horse blends in with the snow. Her hold over Pemberton is displayed in the way that Pemberton tells Buchanan that Pemberton's opinion is the same as Serena's when Buchanan stifles her.

The bear attack lends some excitement and action to the novel. The author describes the attack in clipped tones that heighten the fast-paced action. The sounds and smell of the fight are described to help the reader picture the scene. The attack allows the author to bring about another aspect of the love between Serena and Pemberton when she tells Galloway that Pemberton would have shot the bear for her and Pemberton later confirms this to be true.

Discussion Question 1

What purpose does the conversation between the workers in Chapter 5 serve? How does the author use them to help tell the story?

Discussion Question 2

What might the panther symbolize? Explain your reasoning.

Discussion Question 3

What is Galloway like? What might Serena find appealing about a man like Galloway? In what ways are they alike?

Vocabulary

wiry, foreman, crone, profusely, daub, pagan, deciphering, eminent domain, offset, musk, moiling, tinged, timid



Part 1: Chapters 7-9

Summary

At the beginning of Chapter 7, Rachel sets out carrying Jacob with her to collect ginseng root. As she walks, she thinks about how she misses her friends who work at the lumber camp, including Joel Vaughn who was kind to her even after it was obvious she was pregnant. Rachel finds ginseng and when she collects it, she buries the berries from the plant before moving on.

Rachel takes bloodroot to Widow Jenkins and offers her witch hazel as well. They talk about how much Rachel might be able to sell the ginseng for. Rachel says she will need to get back to work at the camp as soon as Jacob is weaned. Widow Jenkins tells her she doesn't think that's a good idea, but Rachel says she has no other choice. Widow Jenkins says she will babysit Jacob if Rachel does go back to work and she refuses to be paid for it.

When Rachel and Jacob return home, Rachel decides to bait a fishing line with a guinea egg to catch whatever animal has been stealing eggs from her hens. As she looks for an egg, she thinks about how Widow Jenkins had told her that when her father died she needed to tell the bees about it or they would leave. Rachel had covered her head with a white cheesecloth and spoken calmly to the bees. She'd thought about how someone might have mistaken her for a bride from a distance and that she'd once imagined herself a bride when she'd been with Pemberton.

The next morning, Rachel finds a raccoon caught on the hook. She realizes that she has to kill it and that if she lets it go, it will just come back and steal more eggs. She thinks that she doesn't have a choice and that's how everything is — you get one chance to make the right choice. However, she knows that isn't true for all people. Some people in better situations can make a wrong choice and just move on. This angers her and makes it easier for her to kill the raccoon.

In Chapter 8, an eagle that Serena ordered arrives at the camp. There is much speculation around the camp about what the eagle might be for. The eagle is placed in a stable. Serena spends two nights and a day with the eagle. Then, she brings Pemberton into the stable to show him that she has tamed the bird. Serena is exhausted and rambles on about how she'd ordered her parents' house to be burned and that she'd had to go to the house and make certain it was done. Serena tells Pemberton that they only need each other and even when they have a child it will only be an image of them. Pemberton urges her back to the house where he feeds her, bathes her, and puts her to bed.

Chapter 9 shifts back to Rachel and Jacob who are both very ill. Rachel tries to treat Jacob with home remedies and wait out the fever, but realizes she must get him to town to see a doctor. Though she is also very ill, she walks to town carrying Jacob. Rachel is



disoriented and thinks she may be lost, but then knows she is on the right road. She sees three wild dogs fighting over a bloody shirt and knows it is her father's shirt. The dogs notice her and she tries to shoo them away. Then she realizes the dogs aren't real and continues toward town.

Rachel stops at the first house to ask how to find the doctor and the couple brings her inside. She passes out and when she comes to, Doctor Harbin is there and tells her that Jacob will be okay. He tells her that her feet are badly cut up from the walk and that she must really love her son. She says she tried not to, but couldn't stop herself.

Analysis

This section of the novel further explores the character of Rachel and continues to set her up as the antithesis of Serena. Rachel lives off the land and therefore has a reverence for nature, unlike Serena who believes all of nature is dispensable in her quest for power and money. Rachel collects plants to use and to sell, but as she collects the ginseng roots, she replants the berries so that more ginseng can grow. This is certainly not an act that Serena would understand or feel worthy of her time. Serena is content to leave the land barren and move on to the next timber tract.

The imagery the author uses as he describes Rachel's recollection of telling the bees about her father's death is striking. He describes this young girl in a linen dress with her head covered with a white cheesecloth speaking quietly and reverently to the bees in their hive box. He describes the clean smell of the box and her quiet voice merging with the sound of the bees as she speaks to them. Rachel realizes she must have looked like a bride and, indeed, the imagery does evoke a sort of reverent occasion, like a bride attending her wedding and speaking in hushed tones at an altar.

When Rachel is faced with having to kill a raccoon that has been stealing eggs, the decision isn't an easy one for her because she doesn't relish the idea of killing the creature. However, she knows that she doesn't really have a choice in the situation. The author uses this incident to continue the exploration of choice as a theme, specifically the lack of choices the poor have. Rachel is aware that her only choice is to kill the raccoon because she cannot afford to lose any more eggs to it. She thinks that she only gets one chance to make the right choice. However, she also knows that people in better situations have the luxury of making a wrong choice with very little affect on their lives. This thought, no doubt, is a reference to Pemberton's choice to impregnate her and simply move on with very little thought to the consequences.

The theme of love is also further enhanced by the obvious love Rachel has for her child. The young mother, though gravely ill herself, carries her son to town so that he can be seen by a doctor. Along the way, she is confronted by her own fear in the form of dogs that she hallucinates fighting over a shirt. These dogs symbolize Rachel's fear, especially her fear of being left alone to fend for herself and her son as is evidenced by the shirt the dogs fight over being her father's bloody shirt. When Rachel finally reaches the town and wakes up after having been cared for by the doctor, the doctor remarks



that she must love her son very much and Rachel responds that she tried not to, but couldn't help herself. This statement highlights the love between a parent and child as an element of the theme of love. It also leads the reader to recollect Rachel's earlier thought that she must not love her child because she might lose him, thus foreshadowing future events in which Rachel will be in danger of losing her child.

On the other hand, the author also continues to demonstrate Serena's warped view of love through her obsession with possessing Pemberton and being the only thing of importance in his life, and he in hers. After Serena spends two nights without sleep or food as she trains the eagle, she is delirious. When Pemberton leads her to the house, she tells him that each is all the other needs and that any child they might have will just be an image of them.

The introduction of the eagle is important in that it symbolizes Serena's growing power. The fact that she can tame this majestic bird is an indication that she might hold power over almost anything. As the novel continues, the reader will learn that Serena has trained the eagle to hunt and kill snakes, which will enable the workers to work more quickly because they will no longer need to fear snake bites. In this way, Serena gains more power of the land and the creatures on it.

Discussion Question 1

What is Rachel's relationship with nature? How does this differ from Serena's relationship with nature

Discussion Question 2

What do the dogs Rachel encounters on her way to town symbolize? Explain your answer.

Discussion Question 3

How does the author use the arrival of the eagle to demonstrate Serena's obsessive nature?

Vocabulary

seeped, tonic, mattock, blunt, gauntlet, ventured, discourse, imprecations, substantial, feebleness, palsied



Part 2: Chapters 10-12

Summary

As Chapter 10 begins, winter has been lingering and the workers think the long winter is due to cutting down all the trees. However, when Campbell kills a rattlesnake, they know spring has come. Serena wants the workers to put all dead snakes in an applecart. The workers speculate on what she wants them for. Several weeks later, Serena takes the eagle out to the worksite with her and it catches a snake, revealing she's been training it to hunt snakes. Later in the month, the eagle drops a snake near McIntyre and he faints. Snipes comments that the eagle is disturbing the natural order of things and later points out the eagle is from Mongolia. Stewart takes McIntyre to see Doctor Cheney. The men continue on to talk about Serena training the eagle and Ross says he would no more tangle with the eagle than he would with the woman who could tame it.

In Chapter 11, Campbell tells Pemberton that Rachel has come to the camp looking for work. Pemberton says she'll have to talk to Serena before they offer her a job. Pemberton rides out to ask Serena's permission. They briefly discuss the progress of the move to gain their lands for the national park and Serena tells him to put the meeting with Secretary Albright off for as long as possible to give them more time to keep logging. Pemberton tells her about Rachel and she says Pemberton must be the one to tell her she's hired and that he must make it clear she and her child have no claim on them. Serena also tells him to make certain Rachel is not allowed around their food.

When Pemberton goes to tell Rachel she has a job, he realizes he no longer finds any woman but Serena attractive. He asks what Rachel's child is named and she tells him she named him Jacob, which comes from the Bible. Pemberton isn't surprised by the Old Testament name.

In Chapter 12, the crews have made great progress in clear-cutting the land and the panther has been spotted more frequently. Dunbar says one afternoon that he thought he saw the panther and Ross says Dunbar is just hoping to win the prize so he can buy a fancy hat. Snipes is reading an article in the newspaper about a meeting regarding the national park. The men wonder if Boston Lumber and Harris Mineral Company could be forced off the land.

Later, as Serena and Pemberton get ready for bed they talk about the meeting and what Kephart is like. As Pemberton watches Serena undress a line from a poem occurs to him.

The next day Pemberton, Galloway, and Galloway's mother set out in the Packard to look for signs of the panther. When they stop, Galloway's mother stays in the car and Galloway and Pemberton run across Kephart and Sherriff McDowell sitting on the porch



of a cabin. Kephart is working on plans for the national park and Pemberton asks if the Sherriff is in favor of the park. He says he is. Galloway and Pemberton continue on and find some signs of a large bobcat, but none of the panther.

When the men return to camp there is a photographer there to take a keepsake picture of a man killed on the job. As Pemberton watches the photographer, he spots Rachel with Jacob and stares. Rachel sees him watching and boldly turns so he can get a good look at his son.

That night Pemberton dreams of hearing a crying sound in the forest that he thinks is the panther. Serena says it is a baby. Pemberton asks if they should go get it and Serena says it's Galloway's baby, not theirs.

Analysis

This section begins with the chorus of workers again commenting on the happenings around the camp. The author uses their conversation as a means of further discussing the theme of nature, in particular the destruction of nature due to an imbalance. The men speculate that the unusually long winter is due to the cutting down of all the trees, which has allowed winter to take a deeper hold of the land.

The chorus goes on to talk about the eagle and that by killing the snakes it is creating an even greater imbalance as evidenced by a snake dropping out of the sky. Ross, the voice of reason, comments that the eagle is from Mongolia. The fact that the eagle is not native to the land is important because the author uses it as yet another outside force, like the Pembertons, that is destroying the natural order of things. The discussion of the eagle also highlights the fear the workers have of Serena in that Ross says he wouldn't want to tangle with a woman who can tame an eagle.

The snake dropping from the sky near McIntyre holds religious symbolism. Snakes are traditionally a symbol of evil in Christianity. The snake is described as falling like a remnant from Satan's rebellion being thrown out of heaven. McIntyre, being a religious man, obviously interprets the event in a religious light and likely thinks it as an additional sign of the apocalypse.

Later, in Chapter 12, the chorus reappears to comment on the national park movement. Prior to the discussion, the author uses the chorus to again interject a bit of comic relief when they talk about Dunbar wanting to spot the panther so he can win the prize and buy a fancy hat. Then, the men talk about what Snipes is reading in the paper and it happens to be an article about the upcoming meeting between Boston Lumber, Harris Mineral Company, and proponents of the national park movement. In this way, the author is able to continue advancing the subplot of the national park struggle. The men conclude that the government will not be able to force the Pembertons off the land.

The author transitions back to the main plot of Serena and Pemberton by including a scene of the two getting ready for bed while discussing that same meeting. As Pemberton watches Serena, Lord Byron's poem "She Walks in Beauty" occurs to him.



The author alludes to this poem because it is, on the surface, a poem about the awesome beauty of a woman. However, on deeper analysis, the woman in the poem is perhaps, like Serena, not conventionally beautiful but is beautiful because she embodies a balance of darkness and light. Pemberton recognizes the darkness in Serena, but because he loves her, he also sees the light.

When Rachel returns to the camp looking for a job, Pemberton's devotion to Serena is momentarily tested. Serena puts his love for her to the test when she tells Pemberton he must be the one to face Rachel and tell her she can have a job, but that she and her child have no claim on the Pembertons. Serena's insistence reveals that she holds a certain amount of fear of Rachel and the effect she might have on Serena and Pemberton's relationship. She wants Pemberton to make it absolutely clear to Rachel that he belongs to Serena. When Pemberton looks at Rachel, he realizes that whatever he once saw in her is gone and he is attracted only to Serena.

In spite of his love for Serena, Pemberton cannot fully contain his curiosity about his son. He shows interest upon learning that the child is a boy and goes on to ask Rachel the child's name. He isn't surprised to learn that the child is named after an Old Testament figure from the Bible. The author includes this detail to reveal something about the lives of the area's poor at the time. Pemberton recalls that Buchanan had told him the highlanders live by the Old Testament rather than the New Testament. The Old Testament has a greater focus on a god of justice and retribution, rather than on a god of love and forgiveness. This focus is likely appealing to people living in hard times where life seems unfairly balanced in favor of the rich. Also, the hard lives of the highlanders is mirrored in the lives of the Old Testament people.

The author also uses this section to continue to set Sherriff McDowell up as the hero of the story and Serena's antagonist by revealing that McDowell is friends with Kephart and is also in favor of the national park.

Pemberton's dream at the end of the section is a foreshadow of Galloway eventually hunting down Rachel to kill Jacob. Pemberton dreams of the cry of a panther, but Serena tells him it's not a panther, but a baby. She goes on to say it's Galloway's baby. Indeed, it is Galloway that is tasked with killing the child as the story progresses.

Discussion Question 1

Why does McIntyre faint when the snake drops out of the sky? How does he interpret this event? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What does Pemberton's dream at the end of Chapter 12 mean?



Discussion Question 3

How does the author use the discussion between the workers to talk about the effects of creating an imbalance in nature?

Vocabulary

defied, denuded, transmogrified, remnant, mentor, stricken, derivation, pettifogger, bard, immutable



Part 2: Chapters 13-15

Summary

In Chapter 13, Rachel is working in the kitchen at the camp. The women there are not friendly toward her. When she tries to sit with some of them at breakfast they call her a whore and get up and move. Joel sits with her and they talk. He tells Rachel that as soon as he can find another job he's leaving the logging company because he doesn't like the Pembertons. They reminisce about their days in school together.

Rachel sees Serena out the window and thinks about the day Pemberton killed her father. She thinks about how easy it would have been to kill Serena when she'd been handed her father's knife and she wonders if maybe she had more than one choice in that moment, but realizes killing Serena would have been wrong.

A woman comes in and says Pemberton wants more coffee brought to the office. She looks over Rachel and chooses another girl to take it. Rachel thinks about Serena on her great horse and the way she only looks straight ahead because she doesn't care if someone steps in front of her horse, she'd just trample them. Rachel thinks it's smart of Serena not to allow Rachel near her food.

Chapter 14 begins on the morning of the national park meeting. Reverend Bollick arrives at the office to talk about a pay raise. Wilkie says men are lining up at the commissary looking for jobs so the Reverend's congregation should be grateful they have jobs. Serena arrives on her horse carrying her eagle and Wilkie compares her to a god. Reverend Bollick leaves saying he won't listen to blasphemy.

The national park delegation arrives. Webb says he plans to write many articles on the national park and Serena says perhaps he could write about Kephart deserting his wife and children and that altruism is just a way to hide a person's failures. Offers are made for the Pembertons' land and for Harris's. Serena asks why the offers are even necessary since the government has already forced many farmers off their land and yet the lumber company can't force people to work or give up land. Davis tells them they don't have to decide today and mentions a deal being made with Colonel Townsend for his land. When the men leave, Serena says the Pembertons and Harris may be able to work together to purchase Townsend's land out from under the national park.

After Harris leaves, Serena tells Pemberton she thinks Buchanan is wavering and she can see it in his eyes. Pemberton notes that Wilkie seemed to be wavering as well. Pemberton asks what they should do and Serena says they will rid themselves of Buchanan. She tells him to invite Buchanan to hunt with him and Harris on Sunday. She says to talk to the men on the way about the Townsend deal because he probably won't get a chance to talk afterward.



In Chapter 15, Pemberton sets out with Harris, Buchanan, Galloway, and Joel Vaughn on the hunting trip. On the way, Pemberton talks to Harris about the plan to purchase Townsend's land. Pemberton thinks about Buchanan's wedding and family members he met there. He inquires about Buchanan's two brothers and learns one is a teacher and the other is a doctor. He then thinks about how one well-aimed shot will make it just Pemberton and Serena. When they arrive at the place where they plan to hunt, Pemberton says he and Buchanan will go one way and Harris can go the other. As Buchanan raises his gun to kill a deer, Pemberton takes aim as well.

Vaughn races back to camp on Buchanan's horse to get the doctor, but they all know Buchanan is already dead. The hunting party arrives back in camp. Sheriff McDowell is there. Pemberton says he shot Buchanan by accident because Buchanan wasn't where he was supposed to be. McDowell notes that Serena doesn't seem distressed by Buchanan's death and Pemberton says she doesn't show her emotions. McDowell asks Wilkie if he thinks the shooting might have been anything but an accident. Wilkie answers quickly that he does not and walks away.

Later, Pemberton approaches Wilkie and says the shooting must have upset him and comments that Wilkie might want to sell his shares in the lumber company and move back to Boston. He offers Wilkie half of what the park service offered. Wilkie reluctantly agrees.

That night Serena and Pemberton talk about the shooting. Serena asks about the sheriff and Pemberton says he's suspicious but has no proof or witnesses. Pemberton says they have everything they wanted and Serena says they have a start. Then she tells him it's time to make their heir.

Analysis

This section of the novel presents additional material to support the theme of choices. The author sometimes presents the theme overtly. For example, Rachel again wonders about the choices she's made and whether or not she could have made another choice on the day her father was killed. She realizes she could have made the choice to take her father's knife and stab Serena with it, which would have removed her from Pemberton's life and perhaps made room for Rachel and her son. However, Rachel knows murder is wrong and admonishes herself for even thinking such a thing. The author also presents the theme in a more subtle manner by making the reader aware that Rachel did have other choices in her life. She might have chosen Joel Vaughn rather than Pemberton as the author indicates Joel has had feelings for Rachel for quite some time. In fact, it would seem Rachel could still choose him as he continues to treat her with kindness in spite of her illegitimate child.

A vignette about a pay raise for Reverend Bolick's congregation is included as a means of reminding the reader that the novel takes place during the Depression. Wilkie reminds Reverend Bolick that the workers should be thankful to have jobs at all since there are a number of people lined up every day seeking jobs. The workers at the camp



are trapped in their jobs regardless of how they feel about their employers or the way the land is being stripped. There simply aren't any alternatives for them. Joel Vaughn makes specific mention of this in a conversation with Rachel in which he tells her he will leave the camp as soon as he can find another job because he doesn't like the Pembertons.

When Serena arrives on the scene after the discussion of the pay raise, she is again described in a mythical manner. The author describes the way the sun interacts with Serena's short hair and the way the eagle seems to be a part of her. In fact, Wilkie even states that the Greeks and Romans could have used her as an image for their gods. He goes on to say that the lowly will never be able to crucify her, which is a reference to Jesus Christ being crucified at the insistence of the crowd in Jerusalem.

At the meeting with the delegation who arrives to convince the Pembertons and Harris to sell their land for the national parks, Serena continues to prove herself to be a shrewd business woman. She has clearly done her research on her opponents since she makes mention of Kephart having left his wife and children. She also makes an excellent counter-argument when she tells the delegates she believes the pretense of making offers on their land is ridiculous since they are well aware that the government could simply force them off their land under eminent domain. She points out that the government can force people out, but the Pembertons can't force people to work for them or take land without the owners wanting to sell it. Her argument is made clearly and concisely in a way that allows the author to make it clear that she is an extremely intelligent woman. Her viewpoint is no doubt the author's representation of those who opposed the national park movement.

The author builds suspense and drives the plot forward through Serena's plot to have Pemberton murder Buchanan. Serena never comes right out and orders Pemberton to kill Buchanan, but suggests it in such a way that she exhibits the control she has over her husband. The entire hunting trip is described in ominous tones. Pemberton strikes up a conversation with Buchanan about what his siblings do for a living. Though the conversation seems ordinary, the reader knows that Pemberton is trying to find out who might come after him after Buchanan is murdered. The author doesn't describe the actual shooting of Buchanan, but stops the action just as Pemberton takes aim, leaving the reader with an eerie feeling.

When the hunting party returns to the camp with Buchanan's body, Sherriff McDowell is there. The author again sets McDowell up as Serena's opposition in that he is the only one who questions what really happened. McDowell doesn't believe the shooting was accidental, but Wilkie is too frightened to express any doubt about Pemberton's innocence.

The section concludes with Serena and Pemberton discussing the murder of Buchanan and the removal of Wilkie through the purchase of his land. Serena and Pemberton again show their obsession with one another since Pemberton justifies the killing of Buchanan with the idea that once the act is done, it will be just he and Serena. He even suggests to Serena that they now have everything they want. But, the author



foreshadows Serena's further descent into darkness when she answers Pemberton by saying that they simply have a start.

Discussion Question 1

What choices does the author indicate Rachel may have made to change the situation she is presently in?

Discussion Question 2

How is Serena's business sense revealed during the meeting with the national park delegates?

Discussion Question 3

How does the author create suspense during the hunt in which Buchanan is killed?

Vocabulary

retain, astride, delegation, brazenness, proselytizing, deities, sophistry, sheaf, mollification



Part 2: Chapters 16-18

Summary

In Chapter 16, Campbell has purchased Christmas gifts for the workers to choose from. Dunbar chooses a felt hat and Ross chooses a pint of moonshine. The workers talk about the gifts and observe that Campbell purchased the gifts without permission, but that he knew he could because the Pembertons need him with Buchanan and Wilkie gone. They notice that Rachel has gotten a toy for her son and denim cloth, but last year she got fancy soap and a hair bow. Dunbar comments that Pemberton should help her and Ross says Serena won't let him. Joel Vaughn arrives and gives Rachel a toy train for Jacob. The men go on to talk about all of the rats that are in camp now that the snakes are all gone.

Serena is pregnant but continues to ride out to observe the work being done. Harris calls Pemberton and tells him he received an angry telegram from Albright about their pursuit of Townsend's land. Pemberton rides out to tell Serena about it and she says the land must be valuable to the national park movement and that perhaps the park isn't inevitable. He also says Webb and Kephart had been at the Savings and Loan inquiring about a Jackson County tract of land.

In Chapter 17, the Pembertons and Harris drive to the Jackson County tract. Harris speculates that someone with a lot of money is trying to help the national park movement. He believes Cornelia Vanderbilt and her husband Cecil are helping. Pemberton thinks the movement will stop when people realize that jobs will be even more scarce. They meet Webb and Kephart on the road and exchange angry words.

When they reach the land, Harris and the Pembertons split up to check out the tract. Serena tells Pemberton she still believes the Townsend tract is a better deal. They stop to rest and Serena talks about Brazil and that no one is currently harvesting the trees there because everyone else is too timid. Harris returns and says the Jackson County tract would be better for him.

They return to camp and Serena goes to the house to rest. Pemberton and Harris stop into the dining hall where Reverend Bolick is holding a church service. They intend to summon the cook and a server so Harris can have dinner. Pemberton sees Rachel with Jacob and stares, noticing that Jacob looks like him. Reverend Bolick begins to preach on pride and the two men leave.

When Pemberton returns to the house, Serena is asleep. Pemberton takes a photo of Jacob from a drawer. He then looks through an old photo album and finds a picture of himself at age two.

In Chapter 18, Harris calls to tell Pemberton that Webb and Kephart made an offer on the Jackson County tract. Harris is very angry and says that if he and the Pembertons



don't do the deal to get the Jackson County land, they won't do any deals at all, including the Townsend land. Pemberton tells Harris he must talk to Serena first. Pemberton goes to talk to Serena and she agrees to the deal because they need Harris's money. She says to have the lawyer put into the contract that Harris cannot begin mining until they are done logging. Serena steps out of the stall where she's been feeding the eagle and Pemberton thinks about how the workers claim Serena feeds the eagle animal hearts to make it fiercer.

Henryson has been hired to replace McIntyre who hasn't recovered from the snake falling near him. The men are working in a cold rain with lots of mud. They stop for a break and talk about how miserable logging is, but that there are still plenty of people wanting the job. They discuss McIntyre's progress and that doctors are considering using shock treatments. A conversation about good and bad kinds of electricity ensues.

Later in the afternoon, Galloway is working with an inexperienced young man and Galloway's hand is accidentally severed. Serena gets off her horse and takes off her coat, revealing her pregnancy to the workers. She ties a tourniquet around Galloway's arm and the man put him on Serena's horse and she takes him back to camp. Galloway says he will live because it's been prophesied. Campbell drives him to the hospital.

Galloway returns to the camp a week later. Pemberton assumes he's there to collect his mother, but Galloway walks out to the job site. Hours later Serena rides back into camp with Galloway walking beside her. Serena tells Pemberton they will be keeping Galloway on the payroll because he's willing to do anything Serena asks of him. She goes on to say that Galloway's mother predicted Galloway would be saved by a woman and honor bound to do that woman's bidding.

Analysis

This section sees the national park plotline driven forward by the interest on both sides of the national park debate in the Jackson County land. When Harris and the Pembertons visit the land, the Pembertons separate from him to explore the land and quickly come to the decision that the Townsend land would be better for their business. When Harris returns and pronounces the Jackson County land his preference, the reader is given a sense of dread for Harris since the author has already introduced the Pembertons' methods of dealing with opposition. The suspense builds as Harris insists that they must purchase the Jackson County land after Webb and Kephart place a bid on it. Serena's business sense is again highlighted as she instructs Pemberton to have a clause placed in the contract that prevents Harris from mining until they have finished logging. The author also introduces the fact that there were wealthy families interested in the national park movement as well with the mention of well-known names such as Vanderbilt and Rockefeller.

The author reveals that Serena is now pregnant, but that she has been hiding this from the workers since they are not aware until they see her obviously pregnant body when she removes her coat to assist the injured Galloway. This lends to her mythological



nature as the author notes that many of the workers had viewed her as not confined to one gender or the other, almost as though she were a force of nature instead of a person. The mythology of Serena is further built by the speculation of the workers that she is feeding the eagle animal hearts to make it more fierce. Finally, the author includes Serena in a prophesy like some Biblical or mythological figure when Galloway is injured and declares he will live because it was prophesied. Because of the prophesy, Serena gains a henchman, as Galloway feels he is now bound to do her bidding. Since the author has already set Galloway up as a man to be feared, the conversation foreshadows the way in which Serena will use Galloway to carry out multiple murders.

A softer side of Pemberton is shown as he catches a glimpse of his toddler son who is beginning to resemble Pemberton. When Pemberton sees Jacob on Rachel's lap in the church service, he stares and his staring is noticed by everyone in the room. Pemberton tries to hide his feelings, but the reader learns he has been hiding a photograph of Jacob in a drawer, which he sneaks a peek at while Serena is asleep. He even pulls out a picture of himself as a child to compare the child's resemblance to him. Pemberton's inability to hide his interest in his son will prove to be his downfall when Serena eventually takes umbrage.

The chorus plays an important part in this section as they continue to sum up the events from the perspective of observers. They note that Campbell is one of the few people who has defied the Pembertons in that he has purchased gifts for the workers and their families without seeking permission first. However, they also state that he's able to do so because the Pemberton's need him now that Buchanan and Wilkie are gone. With this statement, the author informs the reader that the workers are aware of the departure of the business partners and that the Pembertons are now entirely in charge of the company.

The chorus also comments on the state of Rachel's life and Pemberton's role in her difficulties. They notice that in the span of a year Rachel has gone from a silly girl who wanted pretty soaps and hair bows to a young woman who thinks of her child first and the practicality of needing sturdy denim cloth to make clothes. They make mention of the fact that Pemberton is responsible for her difficult life and that he ought to help her, but they know he cannot because of Serena. They remark, too, on Joel Vaughn's interest in Rachel when he kindly offers her a toy train for Jacob that he has obviously used his Christmas allotment to purchase.

Finally, the chorus also makes further note of the way the Pembertons have caused a serious imbalance in nature. They talk about the number of rats that have invaded the camp lately. They realize this is because the predator that normally would hunt them, the snake, has been eliminated from the area by Serena's eagle.

The religious motif is carried out in this section in two ways. First, when the heavy rains and resulting mud are described, the author incorporates a religious metaphor when he writes "the workers resembled half-formed Adams dredged from the mud, not yet molded to human." (Chapter 18, paragraph 31) This refers to the creation of mankind in the Bible when Adam was formed from the dust of the earth. And, in Chapter 17, the



author includes a scene in which Pemberton and Harris step into a worship service looking for the cook and a server. The scripture quoted by Reverend Bolick is from the Old Testament book Obadiah, which is the shortest book of the Old Testament in which Obadiah delivers a prophecy that is aimed at the proud and deceitful people of Edom, the enemies of the Israelites. Edom has been gloating about the destruction of Jerusalem. In the prophecy, God promises Edom will be punished. Reverend Bolick is comparing Pemberton to the people of Edom and is indicating that Pemberton will one day receive his judgment.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Serena believe Galloway will do anything she asks of him following his accident?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of Pemberton looking at Jacob's photograph as well as his own childhood photograph?

Discussion Question 3

What do the workers notice about Rachel when they are watching people pick their Christmas gifts?

Vocabulary

tabulated, esoteric, apprised, chastising, crucial, proximity, doggerel, irony, timid



Part 2: Chapters 19-21

Summary

At the start of Chapter 19, the camp has been plagued by accidents and death. Snipes's crew has been working in a particularly dark area and he is convinced their gloomy state of mind is due to a lack of sunshine. The men have a conversation about the effect of darkness on mood. Galloway passes by and Snipes's men talk about Galloway's accident and Serena's part in saving him. When they return to work, Dunbar is killed by a falling limb.

Doctor Cheney and Serena discuss the number of recent deaths. Cheney notices Galloway outside the door and comments on this new addition to Serena's menagerie of pets. Cheney leaves and Serena and Pemberton talk about developments in the national park plans. Pemberton says Harris called and said the Cecils weren't backing Webb and Kephart. Serena says she believes there wasn't anyone backing them and it was all a trick to get Harris interested in the Jackson County tract instead of the Townsend tract.

In Chapter 20, Rachel is performing repairs on her cabin. The work is hard and she thinks about how she wishes she were at church so she could relax and listen to the Reverend's words while holding Jacob. When she begins to fix the chinking on the cabin, she hands Jacob a trowel and shows him how to do it, too. Then she carries heavy fieldstones to the roof to repair the chimney. When she's done, she stays on the roof looking out at the land and thinks about a time in school when the teacher had used a multicolored map to teach the states.

Widow Jenkins brings Rachel dinner and compliments her on the work she's done on the cabin. She tells Rachel that Joel Vaughn asked about her at the church service and says he'd make a good match for Rachel. Rachel says the Harmons aren't very fortunate in matters of love. Rachel asks if Widow Jenkins knew where her mother had gone when she left Rachel's father. She says she doesn't know, but that Rachel's mother left because life was hard there and she didn't like the way the mountains shut out the sun. She tells Rachel that her mother had wanted to take Rachel, but her father wouldn't allow it. Widow Jenkins says that is a good thing in a way because when a person is born in the mountains, the mountains become a part of them and no other place will ever feel right. Rachel thinks about how the mountains have always felt sheltering to her.

At the beginning of Chapter 21, men seeking work continue to come to the camp. They wait for an injured or killed worker to be brought in hoping they can replace him. As Serena goes about camp, Galloway follows her. None of the workers mention her pregnancy, but they acknowledge it with small gifts of spring water and berries.



Snipes and his men talk about how McIntyre would say the way the workers are treating Serena is idolatry. Stewart says McIntyre is doing a bit better. They go on to talk about the developments with the land deals. Stewart says he heard Harris has geologists looking for copper on the Jackson County land. Then they talk about Serena's pregnancy and Stewart says he heard Serena has been eating bloody beef to make the baby fiercer and that she bares her belly to the moon at night to soak in its power.

In the eighth month of her pregnancy, Serena experiences pain in her lower abdomen. Cheney assures her she is fine and it's just gastrointestinal upset. He suggests Pemberton get her some peppermints to sooth her stomach. The next morning Pemberton awakens to Serena sitting on the side of the bed. She is bleeding. He rushes her onto the train and they travel to the hospital. By the time they arrive, Serena is unconscious. Serena is in need of blood, which Pemberton donates. The doctor performs a c-section on Serena and the baby is dead. Pemberton passes out still giving blood to Serena. When he wakes up, the doctor informs him Serena will be fine, but she cannot have any more children. Pemberton asks the child's gender and is told it was a boy. He asks if the child might have survived if they had arrived earlier. The doctor says it probably would have.

Campbell has been waiting at the hospital. Pemberton instructs him to go back to camp and asks where Cheney is. Campbell says he went to get Serena flowers and Pemberton says he'll deal with Cheney later. Campbell says Galloway also came by asking where Cheney was.

Serena is awake when Pemberton enters her room. He tells her about the baby. She notices the bruise on his arm where he gave blood and says their blood merged anyway.

Analysis

The novel has begun to take an even darker turn and as it does so, the author delves deeper into the theme of death. The author makes mention of the unusual number of deaths that have continued to occur. Men are now lining up at the commissary in hopes of replacing injured and killed workers. Of course, Serena believes the increased deaths are just the natural result of working on steeper land in the rain. The author includes a graphic description of the impalement of Dunbar on a fallen limb. The death occurs immediately after he's been outspoken about his feelings about Galloway and what people around camp have been saying about Galloway's accident and Serena's part in saving him. The death appears to be a punishment of sorts for Dunbar's speaking out against Serena and her henchman.

He again utilizes darkness as a symbol for Serena and the effect she has had on the land and the people on it. Snipes talks about the darkness they are working in and the way it has made them all feel more fatalistic. While the conversation lends some humor to the story as the men talk about McIntyre being used as a scarecrow while he soaks up some sun, there is some scientific merit in the discussion as well since Snipes



seems to be talking about seasonal affective disorder, which is a disorder that causes an individual to experience depression due to a lack of sunlight. By including this detail, the author again shows the chorus to be intelligent and aware. The conversation then turns to the darkness that Galloway himself brings. Galloway has become an extension of Serena and the darkness that surrounds Serena now surrounds him as well. Doctor Cheney even makes mention of Galloway being a pet in Serena's menagerie, like her eagle. This is an apt comparison since Galloway will prove to be as deadly to Serena's enemies as the eagle is to the snakes.

Serena's pregnancy lends additional fuel to the view of her as a mythological creature. The workers don't dare to speak of the pregnancy, but they begin to bring her small gifts of spring water, berries, and honey like offerings to a God. Snipes makes mention of this idolatry in his conversation with the rest of the chorus. In addition to the offerings, there is also speculation of Serena eating bloody beef and baring her belly to the moon.

Though Serena loses the baby, she still accomplishes her goal since all she has really wanted is to merge Pemberton's blood with hers in an attempt to make them one. She has repeatedly mentioned that she desires to be alone with him as she believes they are the only two people in the world who matter. Her obsession with him may not have born a child, but it has resulted in their merge all the same. The image of Pemberton lying at her side squeezing the bulb to pump his own blood into her serves to substantiate the idea of the two becoming one.

The death of Cheney is foreshadowed in Pemberton's discussion with Campbell when he asks where Cheney is and says he has unfinished business with the man. Campbell responds that Galloway also asked after Cheney, which leads the reader to understand that Cheney is in grave danger.

On the other side of all this darkness is Rachel, who works tirelessly on her cabin while Jacob plays nearby. Rachel passes on the knowledge of the people who live on the land when she hands Jacob a trowel to teach him how to repair the mortar on the house. This is reminiscent of the way that Rachel's father taught her how to care for the farm as she was growing up. While Rachel works hard and relishes the time she spends relaxing during church services with Jacob on her lap, she also reveals that she doesn't find life in the mountains difficult in the way her mother did. Instead, she feels sheltered by the mountains as though cupped in a pair of hands. The author again uses a religious image when he writes that Rachel thought of the hands feeling like God's hands, hard yet gentle and protective.

In Rachel, another side of love is shown, a love that is the opposite of the twisted and obsessive love between Pemberton and Serena. Widow Jenkins talks to Rachel about love and the idea that Joel Vaughn might be a good match for her. Joel has asked about Rachel and why she didn't attend the church service. He clearly cares for her, but Rachel holds to her belief that she isn't meant for love, just as her father wasn't. However, the scene leads the reader to believe that Rachel and Joel will eventually find their way together. Widow Jenkins herself also represents a kind and gentle love in the way she brings a basket of home-cooked food for Rachel and Jacob because she



knows how hard Rachel has been working. She spends a few moments just sitting with Rachel and holding Jacob.

Discussion Question 1

How is the theme of death developed in this section of the novel?

Discussion Question 2

What might the conversation at the end of Chapter 21 between Campbell and Pemberton foreshadow?

Discussion Question 3

How is the mythology of Serena further supported in the way the workers treat her pregnancy?

Vocabulary

deposed, deranged, embedded, menagerie, archaic, hewing, mottle, omen, physiques, summit, geologists



Part 3: Chapters 22-24

Summary

In Chapter 22, Serena returns to the camp and the workers look on in awe since many had lost women in childbirth, but Serena had survived. Pemberton nurses Serena back to health over the next several days while Galloway remains outside Serena's door. As she recovers, Serena speaks passionately of logging in Brazil and looks over documents and maps of South America she had kept in a trunk. Pemberton realizes she's been planning to conduct business in Brazil for years.

Weeks later, Pemberton is in his office working on the payroll and he sees the name Jacob Ballard in the ledger. The name makes him think of his son and he takes out his photo album to look at the pictures of himself as a child and of his son.

Snipes and his crew talk about the death of Doctor Cheney. There are no suspects and the men believe that's because the sheriff in Asheville is being paid off by the Pembertons. They comment that Sheriff McDowell cannot be bought. The conversation turns to the national parks and Snipes says the government has bought the Townsend land. Henryson expresses concern for his brother-in-law who had worked for Townsend and will now be out of work. Snipes says he'll put a word in with Campbell, but that there are many men already waiting for jobs, even at the Jackson County tract. Ross quips that there's an opening for a doctor and Henryson says a person has a better chance of dodging a tree or an axe blade than of dodging Galloway.

Chapter 23 begins one month after Serena has returned from the hospital. Serena rides out on her horse with Galloway following. Pemberton is reluctant to leave camp because he's worried about Serena and also because Campbell didn't show up for work. Pemberton finally goes out to the saw mill where he sees Jacob Ballard who is working the log jam in his bare feet. As Pemberton is about to leave, Jacob falls into the water and is trapped by the logs, killing him. His death affects Pemberton who nearly faints.

When Pemberton returns to camp, Campbell still hasn't come. Pemberton tells Serena that they are to meet their potential investors, the Calhouns, at the Cecils on the weekend. Serena asks if Campbell has shown up and Pemberton tells her he has not. She says that she heard he'd deserted and that she'll give him until morning before sending Galloway after him. Pemberton asks why they should bring him back and Serena says Campbell knows who they have paid off and the workers also need to see that loyalty is important.

Stewart, Ross, and Henryson talk about McIntyre's slow recovery and watch as the Pembertons and Galloway pass by. They mention that Campbell didn't come to work and Henryson says Vaughn saw Campbell packing his car in the middle of the night.



They wonder how long it will be until Serena sends Galloway after Campbell. They say that Galloway's mother helps with the killings.

In Chapter 24, the Pembertons are going to meet the Calhouns. On the way Pemberton tells Serena that he heard McDowell was in the commissary asking questions about Campbell. They arrive at the Vanderbilt mansion and are welcomed by Cecil. Serena tenses as women offer her condolences for the loss of her baby. They meet Calhoun and Lowenstein. Serena tries to sell them on the idea of investing in her Brazil venture. Harris says he's not interested in Brazil and reveals that he's found rubies on his tract. Serena asks where he found them and Harris says they must have washed downstream. Serena suggests the jewels were planted there to trick Harris. Pemberton notices Serena glaring at Harris the way she once had at Buchanan and Cheney.

The host takes the guests to show them a Renoir painting he has. When Serena is asked her opinion she states that Renoir is an artist for people who don't know a lot about painting. She thinks he is timid and sentimental. Cecil seems offended, but doesn't argue.

At dinner, Webb asks Pemberton if he is envious of the wealth around him. Serena says it's all just useless baubles and that there are better ways to make a mark on the world. Webb brings up Harris's claim of being tricked and that someone must have known he'd betray the Pembertons in his own interest. Webb says it will now be easier for the government to enact eminent domain and Serena says they'll have every tree cut down by then and by the time the trees grow back they will have logged an entire country.

When Serena and Pemberton return home, Pemberton tries to convince Serena that what Harris did isn't so bad. She disagrees and says that once they are in Brazil their investors will be far away and it will be just them. Serena talks to Galloway while Pemberton thinks that she will be able to convince the investors to invest in the Brazil venture because they will believe Serena capable of anything.

Analysis

Pemberton demonstrates an increased interest in his son. Just seeing the name Jacob in print in the payroll ledger has an effect on him and causes him to take out the picture of his son. Later, when the young man named Jacob dies in an accident at the saw mill as Pemberton is looking on, Pemberton becomes physically ill at the shock of it. The increased interest is due to the fact that Jacob is Pemberton's only heir since Serena lost the baby and is now unable to have children. The author indicates that Pemberton is aware that he must keep his interest a secret from Serena by the fact that he only looks at the picture in secret.

The dark action of the book is ramped up in the death of two more characters: Cheney and Campbell. The foreshadow of Cheney's death is fulfilled when he is found with his tongue cut out and peppermints in his hands, indicating his death was at the hand of Galloway. The peppermints represent the remedy Cheney had suggested for Serena's



misdiagnosed upset stomach. The missing tongue indicates Galloway believes Cheney spoke foolishly. Campbell is murdered for deserting. The Pemberton's are aware of the information Campbell knows about the dirty deals they've made, which makes him a threat. To Serena, Campbell's desertion symbolizes a lack of loyalty that she cannot abide and his death serves as a warning to the workers.

McDowell's position as Serena's opposition is further developed through his investigation of the deaths of Cheney and Campbell. The chorus recognizes McDowell as being a person the Pembertons will be unable to bribe as they've bribed the sheriff from Asheville. McDowell is relentless in his pursuit of the Pemberton's, even going so far as to come to the commissary to inquire about Campbell.

The author indicates a certain naivete in Pemberton. First, when Serena says she'll send Galloway after Campbell if he doesn't return, Pemberton initially believes she means to have Galloway bring Campbell back. The reader, though, knows that Serena's plans are darker and Pemberton eventually does, too. Then, after the Pembertons return from the Biltmore Estate, Pemberton tries in vain to keep Serena from sending Galloway after Harris. He tries in vain to convince her that Harris didn't do anything they wouldn't have done in the same position. When Pemberton hears Serena giving Galloway the order to go after Campbell, he knows her face shows no more emotion than if she'd just been asking him to mail a letter. The fact that Pemberton doesn't remain with Serena while she gives the order, but instead goes inside to pour himself a drink indicates his discomfort with her plans. Through these events, the author shows that Pemberton may not be completely on board with Serena's plans.

Pemberton's differences with Serena are also indicated by his feelings toward her desire to begin logging in Brazil. Pemberton is a bit astonished to see the maps and documents about Brazil that Serena has kept in her trunk. He realizes at that point that what he thought was a silly pipe dream is really something Serena has been planning for years. When they meet with the investors, Pemberton doesn't try to stop Serena from convincing the investors to invest in the Brazil venture, but he doesn't aid Serena in the discussion either. At the close of Chapter 24, as Pemberton thinks about the fact that the investors will provide the money, he is clearly uneasy with the power Serena has over other people as well as himself.

Serena is obsessed with the idea of leaving some kind of mark on the world. The author shows this through the conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Webb at the Biltmore Estate. Webb asks Pemberton if he's jealous of the incredible wealth he sees around him, and Serena says it's all just useless baubles. She has shown before that her desire to advance the business isn't for fancy things since she's happy to live in Spartan conditions so that more money can be directed toward the business. She's also not a woman who wears expensive clothing or jewelry. Instead, she tells the Webbs that there are more important ways of making an impact. When she rubs the mahogany table, she is implying that she believes harvesting the mahogany that grows in Brazil will be her impact.



The chorus again serves to explain the events going on around them. They comment on the death of Cheney and the way the Pemberton's have paid people off to get away with murder. They also talk about the goodness of McDowell and his inability to be bought. They also show the concern that common people had about the instability of jobs during the Depression. Henryson talks about his brother-in-law who will lose his job with the purchase of the Townsend tract by the government. This was likely a common concern among the people as the national park plan advanced. The chorus also informs the reader that Cheney has indeed deserted as he was observed packing his car in the middle of the night.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the death of Jacob Ballard have such a profound affect on Pemberton?

Discussion Question 2

How does the author indicate that Pemberton may not be completely on board with Serena's plans for their future?

Discussion Question 3

How does Serena plan to make an impact on the world? Does Pemberton believe she will be able to do so? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

jaundiced, exhumed, ledger, assemblage, staccato, investors, portent, parapets, vagaries, derisively



Part 3: Chapters 25-27

Summary

At the beginning of Chapter 25 Ross and his crew are looking out over the cemetery that was the first piece of land set aside when the company began logging the land. They reflect on the death of Jacob Ballard. They also discuss Harris's death and that Webb wrote an editorial saying the coroner had been paid off by the Pembertons. They speculate about who will be next to be murdered.

The next Sunday, the Pembertons ride out to Shanty Mountain. As they do, they pass a funeral procession for another worker killed. They ride on and Serena remarks that Harris's betrayal was a necessary reminder that others will make her and Pemberton vulnerable. He remembers that he'd been warned about Serena when he first met her and that Serena had told him she'd only come to the party because she'd heard a timber man would be there.

That night Pemberton watches Serena go out on the porch to talk to Galloway. Joel Vaughn is also there and Galloway gives him paper to write something on. After Serena and Galloway leave, Vaughn heads quickly toward his house. Pemberton wonders what order Galloway was given, but thinks that if he doesn't know, there's nothing he can do about it. He begins to drink bourbon straight from the bottle.

In Chapter 26, McDowell arrives at the camp and tells Pemberton Widow Jenkins was murdered and the evidence indicates the murderer was left-handed. He also says there were two sets of footprints, one male and one female. When Pemberton says he didn't know Widow Jenkins, McDowell tells him that he thinks Serena and Galloway thought Widow Jenkins could tell them where to find Rachel and Jacob. Pemberton asks if Rachel and Jacob were harmed and McDowell tells him to ask Serena. Pemberton insists Serena wasn't involved. McDowell goes on to accuse Pemberton of paying people off to get away with murder. McDowell vows that he will do something about Widow Jenkins's murder and will not let Rachel and Jacob be hurt.

After McDowell leaves, Pemberton takes his hunting knife out of the drawer and finds there is wet blood on it. He considers throwing the knife into the splash pond, but remembers it was his wedding present, so he wipes it off and puts it back. Pemberton then goes to Waynesville to try to buy McDowell's cooperation. He tells McDowell that if he cooperates, he can keep his job. McDowell says he will continue his investigation.

Rachel and Jacob enter McDowell's office and Pemberton is struck again by how much Jacob looks like him. He recalls seeing the glint of the knife blade in Serena's hand and wonders if she took Jacob's picture from the drawer as well, then thinks she probably took Pemberton's childhood picture. McDowell pulls his gun and orders Pemberton to leave. Pemberton waits outside until he sees Rachel and Jacob leave the office with McDowell and get into his car. He follows them as they drive toward Deep Creek.



On his way back to the camp, Pemberton remembers his father's funeral and that he'd thrown away his mother's and sister's letters unopened in an attempt to free himself from his past. He stops to look at the gash they've made in the land, wishing it were enough. He looks at the peak of the mountain and imagines himself falling.

In Chapter 27, Rachel wakes up thinking about how Sheriff McDowell had come to her door and taken her and Jacob away, saying he didn't want to take a chance. McDowell takes them to Kephart's cabin near Deep Creek and tells her Widow Jenkins was murdered and that he believes it was Serena and Galloway. Rachel knows Serena is after her because she gave Pemberton what Serena could not, a child.

McDowell calls Kephart into the cabin and asks him to allow Rachel and Jacob to stay a few hours. Kephart offers Rachel a bed for Jacob to lie on and some food for them to eat. She takes her dishes out to the creek to wash, and when she returns Kephart is feeding Jacob a bottle. When Jacob fusses, Kephart goes out to his barn and brings in two fox kits to show him. When Rachel comments that it looks like Kephart was a good parent to the kits, he says it's the first time he's been a good parent.

When McDowell returns in the evening, he brings marbles for Jacob to play with. Kephart says Jacob is too young for them, but brings a sock for Jacob to keep his marbles in. McDowell takes Rachel back to her cabin to pack some things. She stops to press Jacob's hand to the dirt and tells him to remember what it feels like. They get in the car and McDowell tells her he is taking her to stay with his cousin in Tennessee.

Rachel asks McDowell how he knew Galloway and Serena were after her and he tells her that Joel Vaughn called him. He then says he drove Vaughn to Sylva to hop a freight car. She thinks about how Vaughn and the Widow are both gone now and it would almost be easier if Jacob were gone, too, because then all they could take from her would be her life.

Analysis

This section of the novel contains the climax of the story. The tension has been building toward Serena going after Rachel and Jacob. Now, she does make a move to kill Rachel, even going out with Galloway herself to carry out the deed. However, they are unable to find Rachel and kill Widow Jenkins instead. As a result, Serena must now hunt down Rachel

The theme of death continues with a description of the cemetery that was set aside before the commissary was even built, suggesting that the lumber company and its workers are well aware of the high risk of death on logging jobs at the time. The author uses vivid imagery to describe the crosses and mementos that mark the graves. From this description, the author leads into the chorus's discussion of Jacob Ballard's death and the tragedy of not knowing who his family was so they could be notified of his death. The author includes this information to add a bit of stark realism to the story since it's certain that this wasn't an uncommon situation during the Depression.



The chorus carries out a conversation about the Pembertons paying off the coroner to lie about the circumstances of Harris's death and the other people that have also been paid off. This conversation makes it clear to the reader that Harris is indeed dead and that the Pembertons are at fault and have been offering bribes to keep themselves safe from the law.

This section also provides the reader with some additional information about Kephart who, to this point, has been a fringe character who was merely a part of the national park initiative. He now takes a more active role in that he provides shelter for Rachel and Jacob until McDowell can get them out of town. The author reveals that, just as Serena had mentioned earlier, Kephart does have a wife and child that he apparently left. This is evident in that Kephart seems to know what to do with Jacob when he fusses and knows what foods a child might want to eat. He also knows that a child of Jacob's age is too young for marbles. The way he treats Rachel and her child and the fact that he may be risking his life by sheltering them indicates that Kephart is a kind man. His mention that parenting the kits is the first time he's ever been a good parent shows that he regrets his past mistakes, and his treatment of Rachel and Jacob shows he is a kind person.

Of great importance during this section is Pemberton's realization that Serena has been carrying out an elaborate plan since they met. First, he thinks about how Serena told him when they met that she only came to the party because she'd been told about a timber man who would be there. The author suggests that had Pemberton been working in any other field, Serena would not have paid him any attention. She was clearly interested in finding a man in the timber industry to carry out her plan to log in Brazil. Then, Pemberton discovers wet blood on his knife blade after the Widow Jenkins is killed and recalls seeing the glint of a knife blade when Serena was giving Galloway orders. Obviously Galloway would have had his own hunting knife, so using Pemberton's knife was a deliberate attempt to make him look guilty if the knife is found. Pemberton's inspection of the knife indicates he realizes he can no longer fully trust Serena. His mistrust of Serena is further clarified for the reader when he stands looking at the peak of the mountain and feels as though he's falling with his eyes wide open. This image brings to mind suicide and suggests that Pemberton knows he is doomed.

Also of importance is the ramping up of McDowell as Serena's antagonist. To this point, McDowell has only been investigating murders after that fact, but now he is actively working to prevent the murders of Joel Vaughn, Rachel, and Jacob. McDowell refuses to buckle to Pemberton's threats that McDowell will lose his job if he doesn't cooperate with the Pembertons. After Joel informs McDowell of Serena's plan, McDowell sneaks him out of town so that he can hop on a freight car to escape. He also rushes to Rachel's cabin to take her and Jacob away before Galloway can get to her and then drives her all the way to Tennessee. Not only does McDowell help Rachel to escape, he also cares for her needs. He makes certain she is fed and that Jacob has something to play with. These are tasks Pemberton would be doing if he'd stepped up and taken responsibility for Rachel's situation and for his child.



Discussion Question 1

What changes about McDowell's role in this section of the novel?

Discussion Question 2

What does Pemberton realize about Serena? What evidence does the author provide?

Discussion Question 3

How does the author flesh out Kephart's character? What new information is provided?

Vocabulary

transition, evoked, sodden, insolent, warrant, resonate, increments, advocated



Part 3: Chapters 28-30

Summary

In Chapter 28, Serena and Pemberton are having dinner and she notices that he hasn't eaten much and is drinking more than usual. Serena suddenly lunges across the table and tells Pemberton she's killed now, too, and they are closer than ever. Pemberton thinks she's mad. He also thinks about the choice he made to walk into the party where he met Serena and thus into this moment. Galloway comes in and tells them that it was Vaughn who tipped off McDowell and that McDowell was seen driving Rachel toward Asheville.

Edmund Bowden arrives to town to take the position of sheriff. Bowden calls Pemberton to report that McDowell was seen talking to Campbell's brother with a detective named Coldfield from Nashville. Pemberton instructs Bowden to tell Coldfield and McDowell that Pemberton wants to talk to them. Pemberton takes money from the safe and his photo album out of the drawer and leaves camp.

Pemberton tells Coldfield that he and Lieutenant Jacoby have some mutual friends and that Coldfield should call Jacoby. When Coldfield leaves, Pemberton gives McDowell an envelope of money and asks him to give it to Rachel. He says he doesn't want to know where she is. Coldfield returns and says Jacoby told him to let Bowden take care of the investigation.

Snipes and his crew talk about the murders of Widow Jenkins and Campbell, who was found in bed with a hatchet in his head. They don't believe Rachel will be able to escape, but think Vaughn may have a chance. Snipes says that Galloway was in the commissary trying to get the men there to help him figure out which town his mother had seen in a vision. Ross thinks he knows the town, but says he won't help Galloway.

A traveling carnival group comes along as the men talk. Hamby, the carnival owner, claims to have a dragon with them and says it's their purpose to convince their audience they've seen the most dangerous creature on the planet. He says the dragon will fight anything and win and tells them to bring their most ferocious beast. Henryson asks to see the dragon and Hamby shows them a large Komodo Dragon. That night, Serena arrives at the carnival tent with her eagle. She steps into the ring with the eagle in spite of Hamby's warning for her to stay out. The eagle uses its talons to blind the dragon and then drives its talons into the reptile's skull, killing it. Ross had bet against Serena.

In Chapter 29, Rachel is in Kingsport. It takes her several days to begin to feel comfortable at Mrs. Sloan's house, but she finally goes out to gather rhubarb to bake a pie. When she returns, McDowell is at the house. He informs Rachel he was fired, but that he's not going to run from Serena. He tells her she'll need to run as far away as she can if things don't go the way he hopes they will. He gives her the money but doesn't say where it came from. McDowell leaves and Rachel thinks about where Vaughn may



have gone. She remembers a day in school when he'd said he would one day go as far away as he could. The teacher had asked him to find the furthest point away on a map and he'd pointed out Seattle, Washington.

Chapter 30 starts in early October and Snipes' crew is one of the last left at the camp. The rest have gone to Jackson County. Henryson asks after McIntyre and Stewart says he's better, but he still doesn't speak much. He turned down the opportunity to preach at a funeral, which he used to enjoy doing. McIntyre once said he regretted he wouldn't be able to preach at his own funeral. Snipes comments on the "duality of man."

Henryson then tells the other men that Galloway has narrowed down where to look for Rachel. He also tells them Vaughn's cap was found with a note pinned to it near the bridge. The note said he was sorry. They believe he committed suicide, but his body hasn't been found.

Pemberton tells Serena that Albright is starting the eminent domain proceedings if they won't accept his offer. Serena says they'll take the offer since they've finished logging the land. He also tells her the investors are ready to sign the contracts for the Brazil venture. Serena looks out the window and says there will be a lunar eclipse that night and that Galloway says there isn't a better night to hunt. When she tries to seduce Pemberton, he doesn't respond.

Analysis

The author returns to the theme of choices when Pemberton thinks about how he paused outside the party where he met Serena and then made the choice to enter. This suggests that he is wondering what his life might be like now if he had decided not to attend the party. The fact that he sends Rachel money and is concerned for the wellbeing of his child suggests Pemberton wishes he'd made a different choice so that his child would now be safe and he might be involved in Jacob's life.

Serena has noticed Pemberton's change as is evidenced by her mention of his lack of appetite and increased drinking. However, she remains obsessed with their relationship since she believes that the fact that she has now also killed someone with her own hands brings her somehow closer with Pemberton. Pemberton feels just the opposite since he thinks her mad, so her murderous act has actually driven them farther apart.

The author uses the firing of McDowell from his job as sheriff to show that McDowell is, in some ways, just as obsessed as Serena is. In spite of the fact that he is no longer responsible for upholding the law, he tells Rachel that he will not back down. He is determined to prove that Serena murdered Widow Jenkins and to keep Rachel and Jacob safe. Thus, the pursuit continues and the plot moves forward toward the resolution of the conflict between the Pembertons and McDowell.

The chorus again clarifies and comments on the events of the book. They provide details about the deaths of Widow Jenkins and Campbell. They also ask the questions the reader may be thinking as well in that they wonder how far Rachel can get before



she's caught. They also speculate about whether or not Vaughn might be the one who could actually escape. When his cap is found, they wonder if he gave up and committed suicide or if the placement of the cap was just a way to fool Galloway.

One of the more interesting aspects of the chorus's commentary is when Snipes speaks of the "duality of man." The men have been talking about McIntyre and that he had said he wished he could preach at his own funeral. Snipes says it shows the "duality of man" because people always want what is in this world, but also what is not. In other words, people want what they have in front of them, but they also want more. Often what people have and what they want cannot be had at the same time. This comment certainly applies to Pemberton. Pemberton still wants to be with Serena, but he also wants Jacob in his life. However, he cannot have both since Serena wants Jacob dead.

The author uses the carnival as a metaphor for Serena's conflict with McDowell. The carnival owner tells the men to bring their most ferocious beast to fight the dragon, and of course it's Serena who steps into the ring with her eagle. The eagle represents Galloway since she orders it to fly out and kill the dragon. The dragon, a formidable foe, represents McDowell. Ross bets against Serena because he hopes that she can be defeated, not only by the dragon, but also by McDowell. In the end, Serena proves she is the most ferocious beast and the dragon is killed. And, eventually, McDowell will also be killed. Therefore, this scene also serves as a foreshadowing of his death.

Another foreshadowing that occurs is in Rachel's thoughts about where Vaughn may have gone. She remembers a day when he said he wanted to get as far away as possible and had pointed to Seattle, Washington on the map. This foreshadows Rachel going to the state of Washington to escape Serena and look for Vaughn.

The national park plot line is resolved in Chapter 30 when Serena tells Pemberton they will take the final offer for their land since they have now finished cutting all the trees. The land is of no more value to them in terms of timber, so she is willing to sell it for any profit she can get. The investors are signing the contracts for the Brazil venture, so Serena no longer cares what happens with the creation of a national park since it no longer affects her.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the author include the carnival scene?

Discussion Question 2

How is the national park plot line resolved?

Discussion Question 3

What does Snipes mean when he talks about the "duality of man?"

Vocabulary

dainty, fancied, muslin, trepidation, enigmatic, duality, vainly, discernable, augury, deficient



Part 3: Chapters 31-32

Summary

In Chapter 31, Rachel is in Kingsport on her way to buy groceries when she sees Galloway. She runs into the depot and asks if the man at the ticket booth has seen a one-armed man. He says he has not and she asks how far twenty dollars will get her and Jacob. The man sells her tickets to Saint Louis and tells her she can purchase tickets on the train to get the rest of the way to Seattle. She asks the man not to tell Galloway she was there.

Rachel goes back to Mrs. Sloan's and tells her to go to her sister-in-law's and stay there. She quickly gathers Jacob and their things and hides in a boxcar until the train comes. While she waits she sees Galloway go into Mrs. Sloan's empty house. Just as she's about to get on the platform at the depot to board her train, she sees Galloway and is forced to go back. Finally, she and Jacob get in the open car of a freight train. Galloway sees her and runs after the train. He starts to get into the car and Rachel hits him in the face with the sock full of marbles, making him fall off the train.

Rachel gets off the train in Knoxville and calls McDowell. He tells her to get on the next train no matter where it is going and then go from there to Seattle. He says he will take care of Galloway and Serena that night. Rachel purchases tickets and asks the depot master not to tell Galloway about her. He indicates he's not likely to help her. Rachel feels a sense of acceptance of her fate. She tells the man he can help or not, but that he should know that the man after Rachel will kill Jacob. He refuses her money and tells her he won't tell Galloway.

At the beginning of Chapter 32, Pemberton and Serena wake up to their house on fire. Pemberton breaks a window and they escape. He has a vision of the world burning until there is nothing but him and Serena. Outside they see McDowell sitting in a chair with an empty kerosene canister next to him.

Analysis

Rachel's escape via train fulfills the earlier foreshadowing of her desire to go where she believes Vaughn is going, which is Seattle, Washington. Rachel knows she needs to take a train as soon as possible, so she must purchase tickets using whatever money she has in her pocket, which is why she is only able to buy tickets to Saint Louis to start with.

When Rachel ends up getting on a freight train to avoid Galloway, McDowell again saves her, though indirectly. Rachel uses the sock full of the marbles that McDowell purchased for Jacob to hit Galloway. The marbles could be seen as a symbol of the friendship between McDowell and Rachel. They are both an act of kindness in the giving of them and a means of saving Rachel in the hitting of Galloway



The theme of choice is carried out in Rachel's acceptance of her lack of choice, or her fate, when she attempts to buy tickets in Knoxville and the depot master sneers at her. She realizes that he will either help her or not and that she will escape and live or not. She knows she is out of choices at this point.

The conflict between Serena and McDowell reaches its climax when McDowell sets fire to her house with Serena and Pemberton inside. McDowell appears to believe his plan will be successful since he sits outside the house to watch it burn. However, Serena and Pemberton do escape. When they see him sitting with an empty kerosene can, the reader experiences that familiar sense of dread and knows that McDowell will be the next to be murdered.

During Serena's and Pemberton's escape from the fire, Pemberton has a vision of the world burning around Serena and him. He feels as though something has been revealed to him. Since the vision included only himself and Serena and he felt a sense of annihilation, Pemberton seems to have accepted that he must stay with Serena, but that the consequences will be catastrophic.

Discussion Question 1

How do the marbles symbolize the friendship between McDowell and Galloway?

Discussion Question 2

How does Rachel feel when she tries to purchase tickets in Knoxville? How does this fit into the theme of choice?

Discussion Question 3

What does Pemberton's vision as he escapes from the fire mean?

Vocabulary

absence, stout, ventured, annihilation, silhouette, kerosene



Part 4: Chapters 33-35

Summary

In Chapter 33, Snipes and his crew are sitting on the commissary steps. McIntyre has returned to work, but he doesn't speak. Snipes comments that he'd have killed the Pembertons with wooden stakes in their hearts rather than with fire since fire is their natural element. Henryson says that Bowden arrested McDowell.

Serena and Pemberton make arrangements to live in Campbell's old house. They decide to ride out and check that the cables are undamaged. As they ride, Meeks comes their way and tells them Galloway called. Serena tries to send Pemberton ahead, but he says he'll wait. Meeks tells Serena that Galloway said he traced "them" to Knoxville and that no freight train left before he arrived. Serena instructs Meeks to call Galloway and tell him to look around Knoxville.

When Meeks leaves, Serena asks what they should do about McDowell. Pemberton says to kill him and that he'll do it if Serena wants him to. She says she'll have Galloway do it when he returns. Serena comments that Pemberton is more like himself and he says the fire reminded him that the only thing that matters is Serena.

Galloway returns and Pemberton sees his black eye. He feels sick for a moment thinking what Galloway's appearance might mean for Jacob. Serena comes to him and tells him Galloway is going to see McDowell.

In Chapter 34, Rachel is in Washington. She is working at a café doing dishes and bussing tables. The owners, Mr. and Mrs. Bjorkland, let her bring Jacob to work with her and give her food to take home. As she walks through the city, she thinks she sees Vaughn in line at a shelter, but by the time she gets there he is inside and she cannot go into the men's shelter.

Rachel arrives at the café and takes Jacob's train out of her purse. When she does, she sees a piece of paper with a phone number and address written on it. The note is from McDowell and she reflects on how deeply she feels for this man she barely knew. She remembers having tried to call the number and the operator telling her the party she was trying to reach is dead. She looks at Jacob and thinks that after she's dead there will still be someone in the world who knows what McDowell did for them.

As Chapter 35 starts, Snipes's crew cuts the last tree. They stop at the creek for a drink, but the water tastes like mud. Ross comments that the creek used to have the sweetest water. The men talk about what a good man McDowell was and about how Rachel and Jacob are the only ones to have escaped. They are sure of the escape because Galloway hasn't gone after them again. They reflect on the changes in the land around them and regret having been a part of the destruction. Henryson says they had to feed their families and Ross agrees, but wonders how they'll feed their families when the



trees are all cut and the jobs are gone. Snipes says the land looks and feels like a battlefield when the fighting is done. They ask McIntyre what he thinks, but none expect him to answer. He says he believes this is what the end of the world will be like.

Analysis

The chorus again provides commentary on the events of the plot. In discussing McDowell's attempt to kill Serena and Pemberton, Snipes says trying to kill them with fire could never work because it's their natural element. This is an allusion to Hell and suggests they are demons of some sort, which goes along with the religious motif of the book. However, he then goes on to suggest a wooden stake might have been a better means of killing them, suggesting they are vampires. This comment adds humor to the discussion in keeping with the nature of the chorus.

In Chapter 35, the men of the chorus cut the final tree, signifying the end of their part in the story. And, indeed, this is their final appearance. They lament their part in the destruction of the land, but acknowledge they had little choice since they needed to feed their families. Snipes's description of the ruined land as being like a battlefield is an apt one since the job has seen the death of not only all the trees, but also many people. The land has also been a battlefield of sorts since the Pembertons have battled the national park movement and good has battled evil in the forms of McDowell and the Pembertons.

The chorus also confirms the death of McDowell. Their talk of what a good man McDowell was reinforces that he was Serena's antagonist in that he was a force of good while she was a force of evil. This discussion resolves McDowell's plotline.

Rachel's plotline is also resolved in that the author includes a chapter in which she is safe in Washington. She has a good job working for kind people and both she and Jacob are safe. The author includes the information that Rachel is aware of McDowell's death and that Jacob will know about him as a foreshadow of the events of the coda in which Jacob seeks out and kills Serena and Galloway.

The only plotline that remains open at this point is that of Serena and Pemberton's obsessive love. Pemberton seems to have had a change of heart since he tells Serena the fire reminded him that she is all that matters. He also offers to kill McDowell. However, the author reveals that his change of heart isn't complete since he still feels sick when he sees Galloway's bruised face and wonders what has become of Jacob.

Discussion Question 1

How does the author indicate that the chorus's part in the story has come to an end?



Discussion Question 2

How is Rachel's plotline resolved?

Discussion Question 3

What indication does Pemberton give that he is still not completely in agreement with Serena?

Vocabulary

lingering, precursor, vow, cynical, vastness, trudging, bemused, solemnity



Part 4: Chapters 36-37

Summary

As Chapter 36 begins, Serena and Pemberton are getting ready for his thirtieth birthday party. Pemberton asks where Galloway has been and Serena responds that he's been working, but Pemberton can't know where or what he's been doing. She says everything will be revealed at the party. Pemberton comments that he couldn't wish for more because being with Serena is enough. She skeptically asks him if it really is.

The investors in the Brazil venture attend the party. Pemberton drinks heavily. When he's asked to make a wish before blowing out the candles, he again says he has nothing left to wish for. When they try to toast him as the man who has everything, Serena disagrees and says he never did get his panther. Galloway appears at the door and Serena says he has been out scouting for the panther and he's located it.

Serena tells Galloway to bring his mother in and says she is entertainment for the party guests. Mrs. Galloway delivers a prediction to Mrs. Lowenstein saying her daughter will marry soon. When Mrs. Lowenstein jokes that she thought she'd be dead before her daughter was married, Mrs. Galloway stares at her then says all she said was that the girl would marry soon. The guests then urge Pemberton to take a turn. Serena tells him to ask Mrs. Galloway how he will die. She tells him he won't die by gun, knife, or a rope around his neck, but that not just one thing can kill a man like him. Pemberton thinks it's all a joke.

As the guests prepare to leave, Serena urges Pemberton to open his gift. He receives a rifle with a depiction of the shield of Achilles etched on it. Pemberton has a vision of floating on the sea holding on to a piece of wood and then letting go.

In Chapter 37, Pemberton prepares to go hunting for the panther with Galloway. When Galloway arrives, Pemberton finds his rifle set out for him with a box of bullets beside it. When he steps out onto the porch, Pemberton sees the photographer, Frizzell, taking pictures. Serena tells Pemberton Frizzell is there to take a picture of the devastated land to support the national park movement and that she gave him permission to do so. Pemberton says Frizzell should take a picture of Pemberton and Serena as payment. Serena is reluctant, but Pemberton asks her to think of it as "a last birthday present." She finally agrees, but doesn't get off her horse. After the picture, Serena places her hand on Pemberton's face and tells him he needs to go. He tells her he loves her and she just nods and turns away. Galloway and Pemberton leave to go hunting.

Galloway and Pemberton hike up into the mountains. They stop for lunch and Galloway hands Pemberton a sandwich saying Serena had it made especially for him. Pemberton doesn't like the taste of the sandwich, but eats it anyway. His stomach is upset when he finishes. They get up and move on. When they come to a ledge, Galloway tells Pemberton to climb up on it and he'll hand Pemberton his gun when he's up. As



Pemberton climbs up, he's bitten by a rattlesnake, causing him to fall. When Galloway reaches him, he offers to make a cut in Pemberton's leg to release the venom. Pemberton allows him to, but suspects the cut is too deep.

Pemberton tells Galloway he won't be able to walk and Galloway says he won't carry him, either. Galloway reveals that Serena had rat poison put in the sandwich and that she'd given him instructions on what to do. He tells Pemberton that Serena told him to tell Pemberton that she thought he was strong enough to be her equal, but letting Jacob live proved he wasn't. Pemberton asks how she found out he'd helped Rachel and Galloway says he tortured the information out of McDowell, but that McDowell didn't reveal where Rachel is. Galloway says McDowell deserved better and he wishes he'd killed him quickly. Galloway leaves Pemberton to be killed by the panther. Pemberton lies there for a while and then tries to crawl out thinking he can prove to Serena he is worthy of her. As he lays in the meadow, he hears something coming toward him and believes it's Serena coming for him

Analysis

The scene of Pemberton's birthday party is written in an eerie tone with several hints at what is to come. To begin with, Galloway has been out on some mysterious errand that Serena won't tell Pemberton about. Since Galloway is never involved in anything good, the author is hinting that something evil is about to happen. Then, when Pemberton tells Serena that being together is all he can wish for, she responds in a skeptical manner indicating that she is unhappy with Pemberton and realizes there is something more he wishes he had, namely his son.

The author utilizes Mrs. Galloway in a more active manner in these final chapters by having her deliver the prediction of Pemberton's manner of death. She states it will take more than one means to kill Pemberton. Since Pemberton's death involves poison, a snake bite, a fall, and being cut with a knife, Mrs. Galloway's prediction serves as a foreshadow of his death.

At the party, the matter of the elusive panther is revisited. When Pemberton again says he has nothing left to wish for, Serena states that he still doesn't have his panther. The panther symbolizes Serena, whom he truly doesn't have since she has already contrived his death. The symbolism is completed in that as Pemberton lies dying in the meadow, he hears the panther approaching and thinks it is Serena coming for him.

Pemberton's birthday gift from Serena is an elaborate gun with a picture of the shield of Achilles on it. The shield is a reference to the mythical Greek hero Achilles whose body was impervious except at his heel where his mother had held him to dip him into a magical river. The picture suggests that Serena knows of Pemberton's "Achilles' heel" which is his son, Jacob. She believes Pemberton's son has caused a weakness in him, and because of this weakness, he is not strong enough to be her true partner. Therefore, she believes Pemberton must die.



As the party comes to a close, Pemberton has a revealing vision of himself floating in the sea holding on to a piece of wood. He then sees himself letting go. This vision indicates that Pemberton is, at least on some level, aware of his impending death and has accepted his fate.

The next morning as Pemberton prepares for the hunt, Serena is distant. She leaves the house quickly as though avoiding spending time with the husband she has condemned to death. As Pemberton is about to leave the house, he finds his rifle and bullets set out for him as though Serena has planned even for that part of his day. When Pemberton asks the photographer to take a picture of him and Serena, Serena tries to avoid the picture, but gives in when Pemberton asks for "one last birthday present." His request might be seen as not just asking for one last present for his thirtieth birthday, but as a last birthday present ever. Serena acquiesces to the picture, but refuses to get down from her horse to stand beside her husband, again avoiding being too close to him on his last morning. She even avoids responding when Pemberton tells her he loves her; she simply nods and turns away. Her love for him and her use for him has ended. But, even as Pemberton lies dying, he is still obsessed with Serena. He believes that he can prove himself worthy of her if he can just crawl out of the forest and get back to her.

The author uses Galloway to provide the details of Serena's final plan. He tells Pemberton that Serena poisoned his sandwich and gave Galloway instructions to kill Pemberton quickly. However, Galloway defies this one order out of deference to the memory of McDowell, who even Galloway could see was a good man who deserved better than the torturous death he was dealt. McDowell refused to give up the location of Rachel even though it might have ended his suffering sooner. But, in revealing that Pemberton had provided money to Rachel, McDowell sees that at least some justice is done because he undoubtedly knew that Serena would kill Pemberton for having helped Rachel.

Discussion Question 1

Why is there a picture of the shield of Achilles on Pemberton's new rifle? What does it mean?

Discussion Question 2

How does Galloway feel about having had to kill McDowell? Why does he feel this way?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways does the panther represent Serena in these final chapters?



Vocabulary

receded, accentuating, extravagance, queasiness, impervious, jesting, quip, groggy, decimated, japes



Coda

Summary

The Coda begins years later in 1975 with a description of an article about Serena. She has been a lumber baroness in Brazil for a long time. The reporter asks Serena if she has any regrets and Serena says she does not, then turns the conversation to another tract of land in Brazil she plans to buy. The article includes the picture of Serena on her horse with Pemberton standing beside her, which hangs on her hacienda wall.

A woman in a Seattle hospital reads the article and tears it from the magazine to place it in her family Bible. She has visitors everyday, including her husband and her son, who comes to see her every evening. She shows the article to her son.

A month later, a man arrives in Bertioga, San Paulo and enters Serena's hacienda in the night. He cuts the throat of an old man sleeping on a pallet beside Serena's bed. Serena puts up a fight, but is killed with a pearl-handled knife driven deep into her stomach. A guard witnesses her death as she stumbles out to the veranda. He later tells the police that he saw a man standing behind her and swears it was the man from the photograph on the wall. The guard says the man disappeared and then swears Serena was still standing even after she was dead.

Analysis

The author's use of a coda provides a tidy wrap to the story of Serena's life. The article about Serena that appears in Life magazine is described as being written like an elegy, which is usually written at the close of a person's life. Serena, however, makes it clear to the reporter that she isn't done yet since she mentions plans to buy more land. Even into her elderly years, she clearly remains a force to be reckoned with.

Although the author does not use Rachel's name in the coda, it is clearly she who waits for a heart operation, which is interesting since Rachel has always tried to guard her heart, but failed when it came to her son and, perhaps, Joel Vaughn. Though the author does not say the husband mentioned is Vaughn, the reader might surmise that she did eventually find and marry him.

Rachel had once thought that Jacob would know one day what McDowell did for them, so he undoubtedly knows the story of their escape from the Pembertons. Therefore, the reader knows it is Jacob with whom Rachel shares the article. Jacob uses his grandfather's knife to exact his revenge on Serena. The knife represents Rachel's courage in having survived Serena's pursuit and justice for those whose death Serena ordered. Though Rachel could not wield the knife herself, Jacob does so for her.

Serena's death completes the depiction of her as a mythical figure. The guard who witnesses the death thinks he sees white fire around her head as she dies and swears



she remained standing even after she was dead. Furthermore, the guard believes the man who killed her was Pemberton as he shows the police the picture and says that he saw that man standing behind Serena. Of course, the reader knows that Jacob has always looked like his father and that it was Jacob the guard saw.

Discussion Question 1

What purpose does the coda serve? Why does the author use the word "coda"?

Discussion Question 2

How does the author make Serena a mythical figure even in her death?

Discussion Question 3

What has become of Rachel and Jacob?

Vocabulary

coda, elegiac, contemporary, hacienda, cobbled, verandah, credulousness, veracity



Characters

Serena Pemberton

Serena is the main character of the story. She is a flat character who does not grow or change throughout the novel. She is an unconventional beauty who wears her hair short, an unusual thing for a woman of the late 1920's. She also wears pants and sports calluses on her hands. Serena's father was a timber man in Colorado and he taught her to ride and shoot when she was a girl. When her entire family died from an illness, Serena was placed in a boarding school for young women. She is intent on living in the present, so she had her family home burned to the ground and doesn't speak of her past.

Serena is unlike other women of her time, even being attributed with mythical powers by the lumber company's employees. She rides an enormous white Arabian around the camp, and doesn't do so side-saddle like ladies of her day are expected to do. When she discovers that snakes are slowing down the workers, she has a Mongolian eagle shipped in. She spends a few days taming the bird, not even stopping to eat or sleep. She trains the bird to hunt and kill snakes.

Serena aspires to take the lumber company to Brazil to harvest the trees there and will stop at nothing to reach her goal. Serena plotted to marry a timber man having attended a party simply because she heard a Pemberton would be there. After marrying Pemberton, Serena sets out to convince investors to support her Brazil venture. Along the way, Serena murders or orders the murders of everyone who gets in her way. Since she is obsessed with completely possessing Pemberton, Serena also decides to kill Rachel, his one-time lover and the mother of his only child, Jacob. Serena's desire to kill Rachel and Jacob stems from the fact that she cannot give Pemberton a child and so seeks to remove any other children from his life. In the end, Serena learns that Pemberton helps Rachel and Jacob to escape, and so she orders his death as well.

Serena moves to Brazil where she becomes a wealthy timber baroness and lives well into old age. When Rachel reads an article about her in a magazine and shares it with Jacob, now an adult, Jacob travels to Brazil to exact revenge for his mother. Serena is stabbed to death with the pearl-handled knife that once belonged to Rachel's father, a man Serena once instructed Pemberton to kill.

George Pemberton

George Pemberton is referred to as simply Pemberton throughout the novel. Pemberton marries Serena quickly after meeting her at a party in Boston. He is completely enamored with her and, in some ways, as greedy a business person as Serena is. Pemberton has no qualms about cutting down every tree on the land and doing what he can to keep the government from acquiring land to further the national park movement.



Unlike Serena, however, Pemberton's first thought to remove obstacles isn't always through death. When Serena instructs him to take Buchanan on a hunting trip, he doesn't at first understand that she is asking him to shoot Buchanan because he is not as adamantly against the national park as they are. Later, when Serena discovers Harris's betrayal, Pemberton tries to convince her that what Harris did wasn't so bad and that they might have done the same thing in his place.

Unfortunately for Pemberton, it is his somewhat softer nature that leads to his death. Pemberton cannot help but care about the child he fathered with Rachel. When he sees the child he immediately recognizes that Jacob looks very much like him. Even reading the name Jacob in a ledger, though it doesn't even refer to his son, makes Pemberton feel strange. When Serena orders the deaths of Rachel and Jacob, Pemberton gives Sheriff McDowell money to take to her. Serena learns of this and sees it as a sign of weakness in Pemberton. She decides he is not her equal and that cannot wholly possess him and so orders Pemberton's death as well.

Galloway takes Pemberton on a hunting excursion where he feeds him a sandwich laced with rat poison and then instructs him to climb onto a ledge where he is bitten by a rattlesnake. When Pemberton falls from the ledge, Galloway offers to cut the bite to release the venom, but cuts more deeply than is necessary. He reveals Serena's plot to Pemberton and leaves him to die there in the forest.

Sheriff McDowell

Sheriff McDowell is Serena's antagonist in that he opposes her at every turn. McDowell witnesses Serena's first evil act, telling Pemberton to kill Harmon, and is suspicious of her from then on. He knows that the murders being committed are the result of Serena's orders, but he cannot prove her guilt. Since the Pembertons bribe law officials, McDowell has no one on his side and must battle Serena alone.

McDowell is eventually fired when the Pembertons finally realize that he is an honest man that they will never be able to bribe. In spite of having been fired, McDowell vows to help Rachel escape. When he learns of Serena's plan to go to Rachel's cabin and murder her, he rushes to her cabin and takes her and Jacob away.

McDowell tries to kill the Pembertons by burning their house during the night while they are sleeping. The plan doesn't work and he is jailed for the attempt. While he is in jail, Galloway tries to torture Rachel's location out of him. However, McDowell remains a man of integrity and refuses to provide the information. Instead, he tells Galloway that Pemberton gave Rachel money to help her escape. He provides this information knowing that it will likely get Pemberton killed and, therefore, delivers justice to at least one of the Pembertons. McDowell is killed by Galloway.



Rachel Harmon

Rachel is a 16-year-old girl whose first appearance is at the train station upon Serena's arrival in North Carolina. Rachel is pregnant with Pemberton's child and witnesses the death of her father at the hands of Pemberton under Serena's orders. She is left alone and penniless to live in the cabin she grew up in. When her son, Jacob, is born, Rachel tries not to love him because everyone she's ever loved has left her. Her mother left when she was just a girl and then her father was murdered.

Since there is nowhere else to work, Rachel returns to the camp when Jacob is old enough and asks for her job back. Serena allows Pemberton to re-hire her, but tells him he must make it clear to Rachel that she has no claim on him and that she must be kept away from their food. Rachel returns to work and is treated cruelly by the other women who call her a whore and refuse to talk to her. The only person who remains kind to Rachel is Joel Vaughn, a young man she went to school with.

When Rachel's and Jacob's lives are threatened by Serena, Joel Vaughn tells Sheriff McDowell of the plot and then leaves town on a freight train. Rachel believes he went to Seattle, Washington and so travels to Seattle when she is finally able to escape Galloway. There she finds a good job at a café working for kind people who feed her and allow her to bring Jacob to work with her.

Rachel eventually marries, though the author doesn't reveal who her husband is, and raises Jacob in Washington. When she is in the hospital awaiting a heart operation, she reads an article about Serena's business in Brazil and shares the article with Jacob, who travels to South America to kill Serena and Galloway.

Galloway

Galloway is Serena's henchman. When he loses his hand in a logging accident, Serena saves his life and he swears to serve her from then on. Serena orders Galloway to carry out the murders of several people that she believes stand between her and her goals. Galloway never regrets any of the deaths, but regrets that he killed McDowell slowly since he recognizes that McDowell was a good man and deserved better.

In the end, only Rachel, Jacob, and Vaughn are ever able to escape from Galloway. Rachel, in fact, gets the better of him when she hits him with a sock full of marbles, causing him to fall from the train she escapes on. Jacob eventually kills Galloway when he is an old man, mostly deaf and still sleeping on a pallet next to Serena's bed in South America.

Joel Vaughn

Joel Vaughn is a young man that Rachel went to school with who also works at the logging camp. He is the one person at the camp who continues to treat Rachel kindly



even after she gives birth to Pemberton's child. When Vaughn learns of Serena's plan to kill Rachel and Jacob, he warns Sheriff McDowell and then escapes on a freight train. Before taking the train, he leaves his cap and a note on a bridge, staging a suicide. The author hints that he escaped to Seattle, Washington. The reader might surmise that he is the man that Rachel eventually marries.

Jacob Harmon

Jacob is Rachel's son with Pemberton. He looks very much like his father, making it impossible for Pemberton to ignore the link there. When Serena learns she cannot have children, she decides to have Jacob killed. Rachel and Jacob escape to Seattle, Washington. When Jacob is an adult, his mother shows him an article about Serena. Jacob travels to South America to exact revenge on Serena, stabbing her to death with his grandfather's pearl-handled knife. A worker there sees Jacob and mistakes him for the ghost of Pemberton before he disappears.

Snipes

Snipes is a foreman and the leader of the chorus the author creates using Snipes's crew. Along with his crew, Snipes delivers commentary about the events of the novel, providing clarification and some comic relief. Snipes wears increasingly colorful clothing in an attempt to ward off the bad luck that seems to plague the camp.

Stewart

Stewart is a member of Snipes's crew and a member of the chorus, providing commentary, clarification, and comic relief.

Henryson

Henryson is a member of Snipes's crew and a member of the chorus, providing commentary, clarification, and comic relief.

Ross

Ross is a member of Snipes's crew and a member of the chorus, providing commentary, clarification, and comic relief. When the carnival comes to town, Ross bets against Serena in hopes that she can actually be defeated.



Dunbar

Dunbar is a member of Snipes's crew and a member of the chorus, providing commentary, clarification, and comic relief. Dunbar is killed when he is impaled by a fallen tree limb.

McIntyre

McIntyre is a self-proclaimed theologian who works at the logging camp. He is given to pronouncements about the coming of the end-times. However, when Serena's eagle drops a snake near him as it is flying overhead, McIntyre suffers irreparable damage to his psyche and is unable to work for quite some time. When he returns to work, he is mostly silent.

Reverend Bolick

Reverend Bolick is the pastor at the logging camp. He leads worship services on Sundays for the workers at the camp. He preaches on pride and the fall of those who are full of pride when Pemberton walks into a worship service.

Buchanan

Buchanan is one of Pemberton's business partners. When Serena perceives him as standing in the way of her opposition to the national park movement, she asks Pemberton to shoot him while they are on a hunting trip.

Wilkie

Wilkie is one of Pemberton's business partners. After Buchanan's death, Pemberton and Serena pay him a pittance for his shares in the company to get him to leave. He accepts the payment knowing that Buchanan's death was not an accident.

Abe Harmon

Abe Harmon is Rachel's father. He is killed by Pemberton, at Serena's instruction, when he tries to stand up for his pregnant daughter.

Mrs. Galloway

Mrs. Galloway is Galloway's mother. She lives with her son and is said to be able to see the future. She prophesies that Galloway will be saved by a woman and will be bound to serve her. The prophecy comes true when Galloway loses his hand and Serena saves



him. Serena has her come to Pemberton's birthday party as entertainment and she predicts that it will take more than one method to kill Pemberton.

Campbell

Campbell is an honest foreman who purchases Christmas gifts for the workers even though he hasn't received permission from the Pembertons. Campbell deserts the lumber company in the middle of the night and Serena has Galloway murder him for his lack of loyalty.

Harris

Harris owns a mining company and partners with the Pembertons in purchasing land to keep it from falling into the hands of the national park movement. When Serena discovers that Harris was duped into buying the Jackson County tract instead of the Townsend tract, she has him murdered.

Doctor Cheney

Doctor Cheney is the inept camp doctor. He misdiagnoses Serena's abdominal pains during her pregnancy, which results in the death of her baby. Galloway murders him for the error.

Doctor Harbin

Doctor Harbin is the doctor who treats Rachel and Jacob when they become very ill. He takes note of Rachel's injured bare feet and remarks that she must love her son very much, to which she replies that she tried not to.

Mrs. Lowell

Mrs. Lowell was the hostess of the Boston party where Pemberton meets Serena. She tried to warn Pemberton about Serena, saying she'd frightened away all of the other bachelors in Boston.

Bilded

Bilded is the foreman that Serena challenges to a contest on her first day at camp. When he fails, she instructs Campbell to hold to the bet and then fire him after he's worked for two weeks for free.



Kephart

Kephart is an author and a naturalist who supports the national park movement. When McDowell takes Rachel and Jacob from their cabin to escape Serena, Kephart allows them to stay with him for a day while McDowell makes other arrangements.

Widow Jenkins

Widow Jenkins is Rachel's kindly neighbor who babysits Jacob. When Serena and Galloway come looking for Rachel and Jacob, they kill Widow Jenkins thinking she will have information about where Serena is.

Ludlow Surratt

Ludlow Surratt makes Abe Harmon's tombstone for Rachel. When he learns that she cannot pay for it, he accepts a saddle as payment and then hauls the stone to her cabin and sets it for free.

Frizzell

Frizzell is the photographer who originally comes to camp to take a memento picture of a worker who has died. While there, he takes a picture of Jacob, which Pemberton keeps in a drawer and compares to his own childhood picture. He also takes the picture of Serena on her horse with Pemberton at her side that hangs in Serena's hacienda in Brazil.

Meeks

Meeks replaces Campbell as foreman when Campbell deserts the company.

Calhoun

Calhoun is one of the investors in the Brazil venture.

Lowenstein

Lowenstein is one of the investors in the Brazil venture.



Lena Sloan

Lena Sloan is McDowell's relative that lives in Kingsport. She takes in Rachel and Jacob when they run from Serena and Galloway.

Bowden

Bowden is the sheriff that replaces McDowell. His loyalty to the Pemberton's is easily bought.

Coldfield

Coldfield is the detective who comes to investigate Campbell's death. Pemberton intimidates him by having him call the Lieutenant, who is a friend of Pemberton's. After making the call, he abandons the investigation leaving it to Bowden.

Hamby

Hamby is the carnival owner whose Komodo dragon loses a battle with Serena's eagle.

Mr. and Mrs. Bjorkland

Mr. and Mrs. Bjorkland are Rachel's employers in Seattle. They own a café and allow her to bring Jacob to work with her. They also give her food to take home with her each night.

Jacob Harmon

For Serena, Jacob Harmon symbolizes the one thing she cannot give Pemberton. She cannot give him a child. Therefore, she sees Jacob as an obstacle between herself and Pemberton. Serena is determined to remove this obstacle by having Jacob killed. When she fails and discovers that Pemberton helped Rachel and Jacob to escape, she realizes she cannot remove what is between her and Pemberton, and so has Pemberton killed instead.



Symbols and Symbolism

Panther

A panther is sighted in the woods surrounding the lumber camp. It's elusive and there's some question as to whether or not there actually is a panther. When Serena hears of the panther, she states that she hopes Pemberton will pursue the panther and that she would be disappointed if he does not. Later, when Serena has already made her decision to have Pemberton killed, she comments that he hasn't gotten his panther. Finally, when Pemberton lies dying in the meadow, he hears the panther coming toward him and he thinks it may be Serena coming for him. The panther symbolizes Serena. She hopes that Pemberton will follow her and continue to follow her even as she plots to move all obstacles out of their way. As such, when she realizes he is not in complete agreement with her, she states he hasn't gotten his panther, meaning he doesn't really have her. And, in the end, Serena is responsible for Pemberton's death, though it seems the panther literally delivers the killing blow.

Eagle

Serena's eagle represents the destruction of nature by outside forces. The eagle is not a species found in America, but is from Mongolia. When the eagle kills off all the snakes, the camp develops a problem with rats because their natural predator is gone, thus nature has been thrown out of balance. The eagle's destruction of that food chain is like the Pemberton's destruction of the land and the creatures that live there. When they have finally completed the cutting of all the trees, there are no animals left on the land. When a flock of birds flies overhead, they circle the land and then fly on and there are no fish left in the streams.

Horse

Serena's horse symbolizes the unnatural power she has over both creatures and people. She is able to calm the enormous horse with just a soft touch and quiet words. Likewise, she is able to tame the eagle and even holds power over Pemberton, who is completely enamored with her for most of the book. The horse also gives Serena a mythical look as Pemberton notes that when she rides the horse and carries the eagle, they appear to be three creatures melded into one.

Pearl Handled Bowie Knife

The pearl handled bowie knife that Rachel carries belonged to her father, who was killed by Pemberton at Serena's request. For Rachel, the knife symbolizes pride. She refuses to sell the knife thinking she'd sell the shoes off her feet before she'd sell the knife. She carries the knife with her even as she runs from Galloway. In fact, she still has the knife



when she is an old woman since it is the knife Jacob uses to kill Serena and Galloway. Rachel, in spite of being poor and having given birth to a child outside of marriage, has kept her pride until the end.

Satin Bedspread

Rachel's mother owned a satin bedspread when Rachel was a child. Rachel remembers how nice the bedspread was to lie on when the weather was hot. When her mother left, Rachel's father stuffed the bedspread into the fireplace and burned it. The bedspread symbolizes a better time in Rachel's life when her family was whole and she hadn't yet learned to fear loving someone who might leave or be taken from her.

Dogs

When Rachel is ill and carrying Jacob to town to see a doctor, she hallucinates a pack of wild dogs fighting over her father's bloody shirt. The dogs symbolize Rachel's fear at her situation. They tear at her father's shirt as a means of reminding her that he is gone and she is alone. When Rachel realizes they are not real, she banishes them. Rachel must get past her fear to do what she must to keep Jacob alive.

Snake Falling From the Sky

While McIntyre is working, Serena's eagle flies overhead and drops a snake at his feet. McIntyre sees the snake as a symbol of the end of times. In the Bible, snakes are often used to symbolize evil or Satan. Since Satan was cast out of heaven, McIntyre likely sees the snake as Satan being cast down. The incident frightens him so greatly that he is unable to work for quite some time and is never the same again.

Toy Train

Joel Vaughn gives Rachel a toy train for Jacob that he used his Christmas gift allotment to purchase. The train is a symbol of Joel's love for Rachel and Jacob. He provides Jacob with a toy just as a father might give a son a toy. Rachel recognizes the importance of the gift and carries it with her when she takes Jacob places. In fact, she makes certain she packs it when she leaves her cabin for the last time.

Marbles

McDowell gives Jacob marbles to help entertain him as Rachel and Jacob flee. McDowell's gift is a symbol of his friendship and caring for Rachel and Jacob. In the end, his friendship saves them and his gift of marbles saves Rachel from Galloway when she uses them to deliver a blow to Galloway's head, making him fall from the train.



Settings

North Carolina Logging Camp

The majority of the novel is set at a logging camp in North Carolina during the late 1920s. The workers at the camp live in Spartan conditions, which Serena believes will make them work harder. Serena and Pemberton also live in a very simple house, which suits Serena just fine because she would rather the money be put back into the business. The land the company is logging is in the mountains and was apparently once quite beautiful as the men talk about the sweet tasting streams and the animals that once lived there. However, as the logging job progresses, all of the trees are cut down and the streams run with muddy waters. The animals all move on.

The land is the subject of contention between the Pembertons and the national park supporters. The Pembertons refuse to give up their land to become part of a national park. They fight to hold on to the land and purchase more land. Though they intend to log the new land, they also purchase it simply to keep it from becoming part of the national park. In the end, they are willing to give up their land when they've cut every tree on it.

Rachel's Cabin

Rachel Harmon lives in a small cabin in the mountains. The cabin belonged to her father until he was killed by Pemberton. The cabin and the land surrounding it were once a farm with horses and cows, but Rachel sells the last of the animals to purchase the things she and Jacob need to survive. Rachel's father taught her to care for the cabin and the land around it, so Rachel fixes the mortar between the logs, patches the roof, and fixes the fieldstone chimney all on her own. Rachel is forced to leave her cabin when McDowell learns that Galloway and Serena are on their way to the cabin to kill Rachel and Jacob.

Biltmore Estate

Pemberton and Serena go to a dinner party at the Biltmore Estate to meet with investors that Serena hopes to convince to invest in her Brazil venture. The Biltmore Estate is a real mansion in Asheville, North Carolina. It was built by the Vanderbilt family. The house is enormous and very elaborate. At the time in which the story takes place, the house is occupied by the Cecils. When Pemberton is asked if he is envious of the wealth around him, Serena responds that there is nothing to be envious of because it's all just expensive baubles. She states she would prefer to make a mark on the world in another way. Indeed, the author explains early on that Serena is not interested in money for the sake of the material things she can buy since she states she prefers to live in a simple house. She is interested in money as a means to grow the business and acquire more power.



Kingston

Rachel goes to Kingston to live with Lena Sloan, McDowell's relative, in an attempt to escape Galloway and Serena. When she first arrives, Serena is afraid to even leave the house. But, as the days go on, she becomes more comfortable and eventually goes out to pick some rhubarb for a pie. Unfortunately, while she is outside, she sees Galloway and has to run again. She quickly purchases train tickets for herself and Jacob, but she is unable to get on the train because Galloway is near the platform. She and Jacob hide until she is able to jump on a leaving freight train. Galloway sees her and tries to get on the train. She hits him with Jacob's sock full of marbles and he falls from the train.

Seattle

Rachel finally escapes to Seattle, Washington. She chooses to go to Seattle because she recalls a time when she and Joel Vaughn were in school and the teacher asked Joel to find the furthest point away from North Carolina on the map. Joel had pointed out Seattle and said he'd go there some day to get as far away as possible. Rachel believes Joel has gone to Seattle and hopes to find him there. In Seattle, she works at a café for a kind couple who allow her to bring Jacob to work with her. The couple also provides her with food. Rachel lives in Washington for the rest of her life. At the end of the novel, she is in a hospital awaiting an operation. She has raised her son who visits her daily and is also married.



Themes and Motifs

Death

Death is a prominent theme in *Serena*. The inclusion of death as a theme imparts a dark feel to the book, adding to the reader's feeling of dread as the plot ramps up. Death is present from the first chapter of the book when Pemberton stabs Abe Harmon. After Harmon's death, there is a lull in which the author develops the character of Serena before delving back into the theme with the murder of Buchanan. From there, Serena is on a killing spree, orchestrating the deaths of Harris, Campbell, McDowell, and Widow Jenkins. The author does not describe the murder of the characters in detail. In fact, after Buchanan is shot, the reader is given foreshadows of the impending deaths and then a confirmation of the murder after the fact.

In addition to the murders involved in the plot, there are several other mentions of death. The job of logging during the time period in which the novel is set was a dangerous one. The deaths of the workers lends some realism to the story. The land for the cemetery is set aside before the commissary is even built. The author notes, however, that the number of deaths on this job become excessive as Serena's darkness takes hold. The men feel a sense of impending danger and begin to carry good luck talismans to ward off death. Snipes dresses in increasingly colorful clothing and his crew begins to follow suit. The only death that is described in detail as it occurs is the death of Dunbar in which he is impaled by a falling limb. The author describes the movement of his body and the look on his face as he dies.

The author also writes about the death of the animals and the land as the trees are cut. There is a description of the sawing of a tree in which the noise is described as the tree gasping for breath as it dies. The piles of deer carcasses are noted as Serena and Pemberton hunt deer for sport and to bait the panther. The death of the carnival's Komodo dragon at the talons of Serena's eagle is also described in detail. In the end, the land itself seems dead since there are not trees, birds, fish, or other animals on the land as they've all died or moved on. The chorus describes the land as looking like a battlefield when the fighting is done.

Love

In its own dark way, *Serena* is a love story at its heart, with several examples of love presented as the theme is developed. The most prominent of these examples of love is Serena's and Pemberton's obsessive love for one another. From the moment he meets Serena, Pemberton is completely enthralled by her. He was warned against her, and still he married the unusual woman. He finds her incredibly beautiful and, on several occasions, he watches her as she undresses or simply moves about her day, riding through the camp or interacting with the other characters. It's almost as though he cannot take his eyes from her. Pemberton so loves Serena that he shoots his own



business partner, Buchanan, at her bequest. Pemberton continues to love Serena even as he begins to disagree with her means of removing obstacles from their business dealings. Even when Pemberton starts to see that his relationship with Serena has doomed him, he continues to love her. When the two of them nearly die in a fire, he decides that she is all that matters. Finally, when Pemberton is dying he still believes that if he can crawl his way back to the camp, he can convince Serena that he is worthy of her love.

Serena reciprocates Pemberton's obsessive love, but not in a manner that makes her bend to his needs or wants. Instead, she is determined to make Pemberton fit her idea of the ideal man who believes that the only thing in the whole world that matters is her. On several occasions she makes mention of her feeling that her world need only include Pemberton, to the point where they become as one person. When Serena becomes pregnant she doesn't seem particularly excited at the prospect of having a child except that it represents the merging of her blood with Pemberton's. When Pemberton provides his blood for a transfusion when Serena loses the baby, she is consoled by the idea that their blood has indeed merged. When Pemberton does not live up to her expectations because he shows that he cares about Jacob, Serena cannot bear the thought of him having anyone else of importance in his life. Her obsession with having Pemberton to herself leads her to orchestrate his death.

The obsessive love between Serena and Pemberton is contrasted by the other examples of love that appear in the novel. Probably the most obvious love outside of the Pembertons is the love between Rachel and her child, Jacob. Rachel tries not to love Jacob when he is born because those she's loved in the past have always left her in some way. However, she finds that she cannot help herself. She loves Jacob so much that she is willing to carry him into town to see a doctor while she herself is terribly ill and wearing no shoes. She doesn't seem to feel the pain and she conquers her own fears all in the interest of seeing that Jacob gets the treatment he needs. When she runs from Serena and Galloway, she thinks that it would be easier if only she didn't have Jacob to love and worry about. She doesn't worry about the loss of her own life, only his.

In addition to Rachel's love for Jacob, the author also shows that Rachel was loved by her own father. Abe Harmon took the time to teach his daughter how to take care of the farm they live on knowing that one day he will leave it to her. Rachel also remembers a touching scene in which her father called her into the barn just to see a beautiful moth. As they look at the moth, Harmon places his hand on Rachel's shoulder and she knows it is an expression of love.

The friendship between Rachel and McDowell also includes a component of love. McDowell truly cares about Rachel and Jacob. Though his interest may begin as a professional interest in the safety of a person in his jurisdiction as sheriff, it is apparent that McDowell develops real feelings for Rachel since he treats her almost like a daughter. He makes certain she has food to eat as they are escaping and puts her in the home of his own relative, Mrs. Sloan. He also purchases marbles to help keep Jacob occupied.



Finally, there is the love between Joel Vaughn and Rachel. The love is unrequited since it seems that Joel is in love with Rachel, but she doesn't return his affection through the course of the novel. In fact, when Widow Jenkins suggests that he might be a good match for Rachel, Rachel rebuffs her by saying the Harmons don't do well in love. The author indicates Joel's feelings for Rachel by including Rachel's memory of the valentine he gave her when they were in school and the fact that Joel remains kind to her after the birth of Jacob when no one else does. Rachel does seem to eventually return Joel's feelings since she decides to ultimately run to Seattle because she remembers Joel having talked about going there some day. The author reveals that she does marry since there is mention of her husband in the Coda. The reader may assume that she marries Joel.

Nature

The author explores several aspects of the theme of nature, including the destruction and preservation of nature, an imbalance in nature due to outside forces, and the beauty of nature. The destruction of nature is probably the most prominent aspect of the theme. As the novel progresses, the land is increasingly destroyed by the cutting of the trees. The animals begin to disappear and the streams are no longer clean and clear. The author includes a hunting scene in which the Pembertons go deer hunting. Initially, the reader might believe they are hunting to feed the workers. However, at the end of the scene, the deer carcasses are simply left in a pile to rot and attract the panther that Pemberton hopes to kill. In the end, when Pemberton instructs workers to go fishing in order to provide fish for his birthday dinner, they return empty handed because there are no fish left to catch.

The national park movement plot line focuses on the preservation of nature, to which the Pembertons stand strongly opposed. Serena is determined to hold on to the land and keep it out of the hands of the national park delegates until every tree has been cut. Once she is satisfied that the lumber company has taken everything they can from the land, she agrees to sell it. The national park delegates seek to purchase as much land as they can to serve as a national park, even if they must seize lands through eminent domain. This movement is appropriate to the time period in which the novel was set since the story takes place during the beginning stages of America's awareness to the need of conservation. The character of Kephart is a Thoreau-esque figure who seeks to get away from civilization and commune with nature in his little cabin in the woods. Kephart's character is likely based on Horace Kephart, a travel writer who actually lived in North Carolina and helped campaign for the creation of a national park. Rachel, too, in her own way seeks to preserve nature as she gathers ginseng to sell. She never picks all of the plants she gathers from a particular area, leaving some to replenish the population. And, she plants berries to help with the ginseng growth as well.

The imbalance of nature due to outside forces is depicted largely through Serena's eagle. When Serena has an eagle delivered to train it to kill the snakes that plague the workers, she creates an imbalance in the food chain. The eagle is not a species native to America and can therefore be seen as an outside force. When the snake kills all of



the snakes on the land, the rat population booms since their natural predator is gone. The camp is overrun by rats. The Pembertons might be seen as an outside force themselves since they come from Boston. When they cut the trees, it creates an imbalance in nature that the workers believe causes the winter to take a deeper hold and last longer.

Finally, the author also highlights the beauty of nature in his exploration of the theme. The author uses a great deal of imagery in describing the land. The chapters concerning Rachel often contain the most striking depictions of nature's beauty. Rachel looks at the mountains around her and thinks about how beautiful she finds them and that they've always felt sheltering to her. She cannot imagine living without them, and so is happy to find that Seattle has mountains as well. Also of note is the scene in which Rachel tells the bees in her hive about the death of her father. The bees are described as producing a gentle hum and the scene is one of peace and reverence. The author also often depicts the trees in the forest as though they might be sentient beings capable of breath and feeling.

Choices

The theme of choices is examined through the characters of Pemberton and Rachel. Pemberton often thinks about the choices he's made in his life and how they've brought him to the situation he is in. Pemberton wonders if one could trace back the tiny choices they make to a place when everything might have turned out differently. For example, he thinks about having made the choice to begin an affair with Rachel that led to the birth of their son. He wonders if he had simply not told her she was pretty, would his life be changed. Pemberton also considers the moment when he made the choice to enter the party in Boston where he met Serena in spite of his hesitation at the door and having been warned about her. Obviously, if Pemberton had avoided the commencement of his relationship with Rachel, Jacob would not have been born and thus created a wedge between himself and Serena. Likewise, if he hadn't gone to the party, he wouldn't have met Serena and would then have been able to claim his son.

Rachel's thoughts about choices center more on the lack of choices she has had as a result of being a poor woman. She finds herself angry at the way rich people, like Pemberton, have the luxury of making poor choices with very little consequence. They are able to just move on without concern for how that poor choice may have affected other people. Meanwhile, Rachel feels that she has only one chance to make the right choice, and if she misses that chance, it will not come again. For example, she knows she must make the choice to kill the raccoon that has been stealing her eggs now or face the prospect of it stealing all her eggs and leaving her to starve. Later, when Rachel considers times in her life when she might have made a different choice, she thinks about how easy it might have been to take her father's knife when Serena offered it to her and stab Serena with it. However, Rachel realizes this would be a poor choice and that it wasn't a choice she could have made. While Rachel might believe that her life has played out as a result of a lack of choices, the reader might realize that Rachel



did have another choice at one time in her life. She might have chosen Joel, who clearly loves her, instead of choosing Pemberton.

Mythical Quality of Serena

From the outset, the author utilizes the motif of Serena having mythical qualities to build her character and the mystery that surrounds her. These abilities are particularly on display in her interactions with her horse and her eagle. The horse is a spirited Arabian that gives Joel Vaughn trouble upon its arrival, yet Serena is able to instantly calm the horse with a gentle touch and quiet words. When Serena rides the horse, it appears as though she and the horse have merged into one strange creature. The illusion is enhanced with the arrival of the eagle that perches on Serena's arm as she rides through camp. At one point, Pemberton notices that Serena actually appears to ride on air when her white horse blends into the snow.

From the moment Serena wins the bet against Biled, the workers begin to spread rumors about Serena that give her credit for a wide variety of almost supernatural abilities and actions. They are especially in awe of the eagle that Serena tames. They believe she feeds the bird animal hearts to make it more fierce and say they wouldn't tangle with a creature who can tame such a bird. When Serena's pregnancy is revealed, the workers stare at her almost as though they are shocked that she is human enough to have a baby. The author indicates the workers had seen her as more a force of nature than as a woman of flesh and blood. The pregnancy leads the workers to speculate about Serena baring her pregnant belly to the moon to soak in its power. They also believe she is eating raw meat to strengthen the baby. When the baby dies and Serena survives, they are in awe that she has survived a situation that has killed so many other women.

Even in her death, Serena retains her mythical air. The employee who witnesses Serena's death swears that she remained standing even after she died. The description of her death includes the illusion that her head is momentarily surrounded by white fire as the moonlight catches her hair. The employee also tells the police that Serena was killed by the man in the photograph that hangs in her hacienda, a man who has been dead for years.

Religion

The author uses religion as a motif in that there are several references to Christianity throughout the novel. The first mention of religion occurs when Serena is introduced to the workers. McIntyre calls her the Whore of Babylon because she is wearing pants. McIntyre is certain the Bible says the Whore of Babylon will appear in the end of days wearing pants. This, of course, is ridiculous and Ross points this out. Religion is used as a means of comic relief when the chorus is conversing since they often get things wrong or make outlandish comparisons.



There is an emphasis on the end times as McIntyre is convinced the world is coming to an end. At the start of the book, he often comments on this. However, when a snake drops from the eagle's talons as it flies over McIntyre's head, McIntyre is so severely affected that he is unable to work for several months. When he does return to work, he isn't the same person and remains quiet. The only words he speaks when he does begin working again are to say that the clear-cut land looks the way the world will look when it comes to an end.

The snake that drops at McIntyre's feet is itself a religious symbol since snakes are often used in the Bible to represent evil, most notably when Satan appears to Eve in the form of a snake in the Garden of Eden. This, perhaps, is why McIntyre is so struck by the incident.

The author also compares the muddy workers who have been working in driving rain to Adam, the first man in the Bible. He describes them as appearing like Adam as he was being formed from the clay, not yet human. The image is striking in that it creates a picture for the reader and also suggests that these workers are being molded and formed by the work they do.

Another interesting image the author presents is of the tools being hung in the trees like the harps of the Hebrews. This is a reference to scripture that appears in Psalm 137 in which the Hebrews are despairing at the destruction of their city. They are held captive and their captors ridicule them, telling them to pick up their harps and play their songs of joy. The Hebrews hang their harps in the trees and refuse to play. The author's use of this religious metaphor indicates the workers probably feel like they are being held captive as they watch the destruction of their land.

Styles

Point of View

The novel is written entirely in third person omniscient with the point of view switching between Rachel, the chorus, and Pemberton. The reader is privy to the thoughts and actions of the characters involved. For example, the author often shares Pemberton's thoughts about Serena's beauty and the choices he has made as well as Rachel's thoughts on losing those she has loved. However, the book never shifts to Serena's perspective, which is interesting since she is the title character. Serena is a mysterious character and the author likely intended to keep her thoughts and motivations hidden as she hides the real details of her life and her past from those around her.

The shift in point of view allows the reader to connect with the people who are affected by the brutal decisions Serena makes. Rachel is immediately created as a sympathetic character in the first chapter, which is told from Pemberton's point of view, because she initially isn't even given a name. Instead, the author simply refers to her as a pregnant girl. This lack of a name shows that Pemberton doesn't see her as important. Only when the point of view shifts to Rachel does the reader learn her name.

The outside perspective of the chorus is important since they fill in missing information for the reader, such as confirming the deaths of several of the characters. They also provide a means of connecting all of the other characters into one cohesive storyline since they comment on all of the action.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is fairly straightforward and appropriate for a high school reading audience. The language is just challenging enough to help build the reader's vocabulary without being too taxing. The author avoids the use of accents, which makes the dialogue easier to comprehend, though several regional colloquialisms are included, particularly when the chorus is speaking. However, the meaning of the colloquialisms are easily deciphered using context clues.

Readers may find the use of several terms specific to the lumber industry difficult to understand if they have no experience in the area. The author often talks about equipment, such as skidders, and logging methods, like splash ponds. While this may confuse some readers, the use of such details provides an opportunity to delve into the rich history of the lumber industry.

The author uses extensive imagery when writing about nature. The land is often described in terms that lend it the attributes of a breathing, sentient being. The use of imagery lends itself well to the theme of nature, especially as the land is further destroyed and the reader witnesses the area falling into ruin.



Structure

The novel is divided into four parts and a Coda. In total, there are 37 chapters plus the Coda. The chapters are numbered instead of titled with the chapter numbers in each new part picking up where the last part left off (e.g., Part I includes chapters 1 and 2 and Part II picks up at Chapter 3).

Part I includes Chapters 1-9. It focuses on Serena's arrival at the logging camp. The characters are introduced and their relationships to one another are established. The reader learns a bit about life in the logging camp as well as about Rachel's way of living. The national park conflict plot line is also introduced. The conflict between McDowell and the Pembertons is developed, too.

Part II includes Chapters 10 through 21. This section of the novel details the fall of the camp into darkness with Serena's arrival. Workers are injured at an increasingly frequent rate and the chorus notes that darkness is all around them. Serena's killing spree begins with the death of Buchanan. The tension between Serena and Rachel is developed when Rachel returns to camp and builds when Serena loses her baby. The national park plot line is moved forward as the purchase of new lands is discussed.

Part III includes Chapters 22 through 32. This section of the novel ramps up the action in both the national park plot line and in Serena's conflict with Rachel. Serena and Pemberton continue to thwart the efforts of the national park committee by refusing to sell their land and Serena's attentions turn more toward the Brazil venture. The suspense builds in the Serena and Rachel plot line until Rachel is finally forced to run from Serena and Galloway. The conflict between McDowell and the Pembertons reaches its peak.

Part IV includes Chapters 33 through 37. This section resolves the action of the novel and concludes the story with the death of Pemberton at the hands of Galloway through Serena's orders.

The Coda jumps ahead to the 1975 and provides the true ending of the story when an elderly Rachel reads an article about Serena, which she shares with the adult Jacob. Jacob finally sees that justice is done when he kills Galloway and Serena.



Quotes

I hope he'll pursue his panther and would be disappointed if he were to do otherwise,' Serena said, turning so she addressed Pemberton as much as his partners.

'Pemberton's a man unafraid of challenges, which is why I married him.

-- Serena (Chapter 1 paragraph 32)

Importance: Serena's ultimate plan to dominate the timber industry and begin logging in Brazil hinges on Pemberton's willingness to accept the challenges inherent in such a lofty goal. While Serena realizes she needs to be partnered with a man like Pemberton to achieve her goals, she is also speaking of the challenge that she represents as a partner in marriage. Serena needed to find a strong man to marry her and had scared off many men before Pemberton. Now, Pemberton must be willing to take Serena on as a partner in his business as well and deal with the difficulties of a woman who will stop at nothing to get what she wants. The panther will come to represent Serena as the novel progresses, therefore Serena is saying that she hopes Pemberton will continue to follow her.

Pemberton felt again what he'd never known with another woman—a sense of being unshackled into some limitless possibility, limitless though at the same time somehow confined within the two of them.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 133)

Importance: This quote reflects the obsessive love between Pemberton and Serena. Pemberton believes Serena to be a woman who can do anything. He is completely enamored with her and continues to be even as she plots to murder anyone who gets in the way of their business or who might come between them. Serena unleashes his potential as a powerful businessman while also trying to limit his world to just the two of them.

All the while, the air grew thinner as the workers made their way up the steep incline toward tools hidden under leaves, hung on tree branches like the harps of the old Hebrews.

-- Narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph 25)

Importance: This quote is an example of the religious motif of the novel. It refers to Psalm 137 in which the Babylonians have destroyed Judah, the capital city of Jerusalem and the Hebrews are lamenting the destruction of their homes. Their captors taunt them and ask them to sing their songs of joy now, but instead the Hebrews hang their harps from the trees. The quote is a metaphor for the way the lumber company is destroying the land and the workers are feeling like captors who feel no joy.

And now this brown-eyed child. Don't love it, Rachel told herself. Don't love anything that can be taken away.

-- Narrator/Rachel (Chapter 3 paragraph 88)



Importance: This quote is important because it effectively sets up one of the main plot lines of the novel, Serena's attempt to kill Rachel's son because he is Pemberton's child. The author hints that something will happen that will threaten Rachel's relationship with her son. Since Rachel recently lost her father to a knife fight with Pemberton, the reader is lead to believe that Jacob might also be somehow killed.

Or was there no chain at all, just a moment when you did or didn't step close to a young woman and let your fingers brush a fall of blonde hair behind her ears, did or didn't lean to that uncovered ear and tell her that you found her quite fetching.

-- Narrator/Pemberton (Chapter 4 paragraph 37)

Importance: Pemberton's thoughts about the choices people make is an example of the theme of choice. Throughout the novel, both Pemberton and Rachel will think about choices they've made that have affected what their lives have become. Pemberton believes his path was chosen through a series of seemingly meaningless choices, all of which lead him to Serena and to his eventual death.

And darkness. You can't see it no more than you can see air, but when it's all around you sure enough know it.

-- Snipes (Chapter 5 paragraph 55)

Importance: This is part of a conversation Snipes has with his crew about how there are things that exist that you cannot see. He is speaking literally of the darkness of the night, but the author is actually referring to the evil that Serena has brought to camp and the dark events that will occur through her and Galloway. Though the men haven't seen the evil yet, they still have a feeling that something has changed for the worse and things will soon get very dark at the camp.

Since her initial triumph over Bilded, the men ascribed all sorts of powers to Serena, some bordering on the otherworldly.

-- Narrator (Chapter 6 paragraph 9)

Importance: This is the first time that the attribution of mythical qualities to Serena is acknowledged. As the story goes on, Serena is believed to hold great powers, such as power over beasts since she tames an eagle and power over death since she doesn't die when she loses her baby.

The woods were hushed and attentive, the trees seemed to huddle themselves closer together, as if awaiting not just the rain but some story about to be told.

-- Narrator (Chapter 7 paragraph 35)

Importance: This quote is an example of the author's use of imagery. The author often uses imagery to convey the beauty of nature as well as the destruction of it by the Pembertons.

I tried not to,' Rachel said. 'I just couldn't find a way to stop myself.

-- Rachel (Chapter 9 paragraph 34)



Importance: This is Rachel speaking about the love she has for Jacob. Though she was very ill, she walked barefooted into town carrying Jacob to get him to a doctor. When the doctor comments that she must love her child very much, Rachel acknowledges not only her love for the child but her feeling that when she loves something, it is always taken away, just as both her father and mother were taken. The quote also lends itself to the theme of choice since Rachel is portrayed as someone with very few choices in life. She realizes she had no choice but to love her child.

But now he knew the truth of the words, for Serena's beauty was like that-something the world opened a guarded space around so it could go forth unsullied.

-- Narrator (Chapter 12 paragraph 25)

Importance: Pemberton is thinking about a poem he once read and how he now understands the poem better for having met Serena. The poem is Lord Byron's "She Walks In Beauty" in which Byron describes a woman who moves within in an aura of beauty. She is not conventionally beautiful, but her beauty has a balance of dark and light. Serena is described as not being conventionally beautiful and is certainly a character who moves about the world in a protected manner since she is able to do things that most people cannot seemingly without repercussions.

Looks to be she picked nothing but denim cloth and a play-pretty for her young one,' Snipes said. 'I remember last year she got good-smelling soap and a fancy hair-bow.

-- Snipes (Chapter 16 paragraph 12)

Importance: Snipes is talking about the enormous change in Rachel since she was involved with Pemberton and gave birth to Jacob. She no longer acts like a young girl of her age. Instead, becoming a mother has aged her and she chooses more practical things. She also thinks of her son before herself as she is probably getting the denim to make clothing for him and chooses a toy for him as well.

'I'll live,' Galloway gasped. 'It's done been prophesied.

-- Galloway (Chapter 18 paragraph 65)

Importance: Galloway says this after his hand is cut off. He is talking about a prophesy his mother delivered to him in which she said he'd be saved by a woman and would be bound to serve that woman for the rest of his life. Serena has just saved him, so she is the woman he will serve. This foreshadows the way that Serena will use Galloway to carry out the murders of those who get in her way.

What Harris did, I'm not so sure we wouldn't have done the same under those circumstances. And the money, we didn't lose that much.

-- Pemberton (Chapter 24 paragraph 161)

Importance: Pemberton says this after they discover that Harris was fooled into insisting on purchasing the Jackson County land. Pemberton is vocalizing his disagreement with Serena, which signifies his realization that he and Serena may not



want the same things. This split from Serena's way of thinking will eventually be his downfall.

Pemberton gazed at the peak a long time, then let his eyes fall slowly downward, and it was as if he was falling as well, falling slow and deliberate and with his eyes open.

-- Narrator (Chapter 26 paragraph 70)

Importance: This quote reveals Pemberton's growing mistrust of Serena. It leads the reader to think of suicide and indicates that Pemberton may know he is doomed.

An image almost like a dream came to him of being alone on a vast sea and hanging onto a piece of wood as waves lapped against him, and then he let go.

-- Narrator (Chapter 36 paragraph 130)

Importance: Pemberton has this vision following his birthday party during which Serena urged him to ask Galloway's mother how he'll die. This image suggests that Pemberton has accepted his fate and knows he will die.