

The Truest Pleasure Study Guide

The Truest Pleasure by Robert Morgan

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Plot Summary

The Truest Pleasure is the story of a couple who enter their marriage out of convenience - Ginny needs help caring for her father's land and Tom wants some land to call his own. Through the trials and tribulations of farm life and a tumultuous marriage, the couple comes together.

When the novel opens, fourteen-year-old Ginny attends her first Pentecostal revival with her family. She is surprised when she feels herself full of the spirit, speaking in tongues, rolling around in the sawdust. After, she is embarrassed by what happened to her and doesn't understand how she could have lost such control of herself. As Ginny ages, she wonders whether or not she'll ever get married. She is tall and awkward, with large hands and feet. She prefers the company of books and family over courting boys - completely opposite to her older sister Florrie, who is beautiful and flirtatious. All that changes when Ginny meets Tom Powell at a church picnic. She is drawn to his silly mustache and humorous nature. Soon after meeting, the couple is engaged and soon after that, they're married. It is clear that Ginny married Tom to have some companionship and to help her care for her aging father's land. It is also clear that while Tom loves Ginny, he was eager to have some land to call his own as he came from a poor family that had no land to pass down to him. Even on their wedding night, Tom would rather start work on the farm rather than be alone with his wife. When they do come together, though, the couple is completely at ease with each other, showing that despite their flaws of character, they do deeply love each other.

As time progresses, Ginny and Tom produce a houseful of children. With the birth of their first child, trouble begins to bubble to the surface of their marriage. Tom attends his first Pentecostal service with Ginny and is mortified when he sees her possessed by the spirit, speaking in tongues and rolling around on the ground. He remembers a group of freed slaves that started a Pentecostal church near his house and how he saw naked women dancing around a fire, calling it worship, and even saw a woman give birth to a dead baby after dancing too hard. These images have traumatized Tom and he believes worship like this is akin to devil-worship. Even though he demands that Ginny stay at home and care for the family, she refuses and keeps attending the meetings, which creates a huge wedge in the marriage. While Tom accuses Ginny of putting her devil worship before the family, Ginny accuses Tom of being blinded by greed and unable to experience the Spirit. Compounding these troubles is Ginny's suspicion of Tom's interest in her flirtatious sister, Florrie, whom he has hired to help Ginny with the washing, cooking, and cleaning, which Ginny resents. When Ginny falls ill with pneumonia, Florrie takes over all the housework, and Ginny believes Florrie is trying to weasel her way into the family so she can steal Tom for herself. Fearing that Tom believes he married the wrong sister and that she could too easily be replaced, Ginny fires Florrie. Even then, she doesn't stop attending the revivals, which draws Tom to pull a gun on her and fire in her direction as she walks to the church.

Even though they cannot seem to come together, Ginny and Tom do not divorce. They live as strangers, no longer sleeping in the same bed or speaking to each other. All that



changes, though, when their land accidentally goes up in flames. They work side by side trying to battle the fire. It is clear to the reader that the land is the most important thing to both of them and they must put their differences aside to save it. This fight is, essentially, their baptism of fire. Even though they fail, it appears that Tom and Ginny will have a fresh start in their marriage as they work to rebuild what has been damaged, both physically and emotionally by the various "fires". Their work is cut short, however, when Tom falls gravely ill from his exertion fighting the fires. Ginny spends day and night nursing Tom through his typhoid, but eventually loses the battle and Tom dies. In the moments after Tom's death, Ginny realizes that she had not appreciated the gifts Tom gave her during their marriage and that loving him was indeed her truest pleasure.



Chapter One

Chapter One Summary

Ginny attends her first Pentecostal church service with her father. The preacher is the son of the Pentecostal preacher Pa remembers from his time in prison. The regular Baptist preacher in town claims that these Pentecostal revivals, or brush arbor services, are just rot and that anyone who attends them may lose their letters at the Baptist church, but Ginny's Pa doesn't care. He wants his family to experience the Spirit first hand. The family all loads in up their wagon to head down to the revival: Pa, Ginny, her siblings Florrie and Joe, and Joe's girlfriend, Lily.

At the church service, Ginny claims that she only wants to observe and that there's no way she'll be one of those women that rolls around on the ground. This statement has two meanings - she doesn't believe in the Spirit possessing a body and she's not they type of girl to roll around on the ground with a man, like her sister Florrie who is no longer a virgin. At the service, however, Ginny is completely drawn in by Preacher McKinney's dynamic sermon and she feels all her troubles and sadness melting away. Joe, despite his stutter, begins shouting out praises to the preacher, and Lily begins shaking and rolling the sawdust on the ground. Lily's reaction to the service has a real effect on the narrator, Ginny, because Lily is usually a prideful, vain woman. Everyone else in the family is having an extreme reaction to the service, even Pa, who has tears streaming down his cheeks.

Suddenly, Ginny feels her body rising up. She feels her body walking into the aisle, like she can't control it, and she feels her tongue moving, forming words she doesn't understand. Everyone shouts that the spirit is in her. Her possession is so strong she cannot even stand on her own feet and must be helped to stand when the preacher calls everyone to circle around her. As the service is coming to a close, Ginny smells smoke and realizes someone has sent the tent on fire. Everyone panics and runs from the tent, then stand together watching it burn down. It is clearly the work of vandals who shout about "baptisms of fire" from the darkness of the surrounding woods. After, the family rides home in silence. Ginny is deeply embarrassed about what happened to her at the service and doesn't want to talk about it. She makes cornbread and coffee for the family when they return home so no one will ask her what it felt like to be filled with the Spirit.

Chapter One Analysis

In this chapter, the dynamic of the Peace family is introduced. Ginny is far closer to her father than her sister Florrie is. Florrie, unlike the rest of the family, has no interest in the Pentecostal church revivals. Even though Ginny is skeptical of the revivals at first, she finds herself swept up in the magic and drama of the ceremony and does exactly what she says she would never do - roll around in the sawdust. After the service, Ginny is



deeply ashamed of what happened to her, perhaps because she doesn't understand it. This section also introduces the theme of "the baptism of fire", an image that will carry on through the duration of the text, as well as the introduction of vandals who hate the church revivals and even call them blasphemous. The fact that Pentecostal revivals are opposed by so many in the church is important to the main conflict of the story: Tom's opposition to Ginny's extreme faith. Another important relationship that is introduced in this opening chapter is the relationship between Ginny and Florrie. It is clear that Florrie is already a flirt with men - she has even laid down with her boyfriend David - and that even though she would never admit it, Ginny is deeply jealous of her sister's beauty and ease around men.



Chapter Two

Chapter Two Summary

Ginny describes herself as the most hardworking of all the Peace children. She has dark hair and eyes and is extremely awkward in social situations as she is deeply embarrassed of her large hands and feet. Once, Ginny had a slight romance with Mr. Simcox, a traveling teacher from Asheville. He came to stay with the Peace family while he was passing through, and he and Ginny had much in common. One evening, after the family went to bed, Tom and Ginny sat up by the fire discussing books and politics, when Tom leaned in to kiss her. When he did, he knocked over the churn, which clattered to the ground spilling scorched milk everywhere. The entire family woke up to find Tom, red faced, deeply embarrassed. Ginny found the whole incident to be quite funny, and realized that she and Tom perhaps weren't a good match because Tom was clearly too serious. Ginny claims that Pa always has a soft spot in his heart for traveling peddlers. She remembers when one peddler, Ahmed, came to town from Palestine selling fabric, sewing supplies, and blankets. He had a beautiful apricot and gold afghan that Ginny loved, but she refused to pay the ten dollars he asked for it. Ginny offered five, but Ahmed refused. In time, Pa came home and invited Ahmed in for dinner. The spoke at length about religion, with Ahmed reading aloud from the Koran. After dinner, Pa gave Ahmed six and a half dollars for the apricot afghan, saying, "Ginny's a good girl, but she's stubborn."

Ginny remembers the first time she met Tom Powell, the man she would grow up to marry. The first thing she remembers seeing was his huge blonde mustache. They met at a church picnic while Ginny was serving sliced watermelon and she was fascinated by how Tom would eat the watermelon without getting it all over his mustache. He sat in the shade of a nearby tree, carving small chunks from the watermelon with a pocket knife before eating them, which amused Ginny. When he dropped some watermelon juice on his pants, Ginny offered to take him down to the stream to wash it off. As they walked, the wind kicked up and stole Ginny's hat, so Tom went running after it in to the field where Ginny's family kept their angry bull, Bill-Joe. After a narrow escape from the bull, it began to rain. Ginny and Tom ran full speed to the nearest tree, soaked through with rain. They watched with a mixture of excitement and fear as strikes of lightning crashed into nearby trees, setting them ablaze. After the storm, the two were covered in mud, rain, and filth, but broke out laughing, feeling like there was nothing else they could do.

Chapter Two Analysis

In this chapter, Ginny's love life is explored. Through her own description, it is clear that Ginny does not think highly of herself and is content spending her life reading books rather than flirting with boys as her sister Florrie does. Despite her awkwardness, Ginny manages to catch the eye of a visiting teacher, but is turned off when it is clear that he



does not have a sense of humor. This exchange tells the reader a lot about Ginny's character. No matter how bad things get, she needs someone who can laugh. Mr. Simcox could not, but this sets the stage for Tom to enter. Even from the look of him, with his huge mustache, Ginny found humor in Tom. When her hat flew away, it was immediately clear that Tom would go to any length to get the hat back for her. This theme of Tom working hard for Ginny's affection carries on to the rest of the novel. When the couple finds themselves in the middle of the lightning storm, the image of fire, or the baptism of fire, returns as the trees around them ignite in flames. Fire randomly appears in many scenes with Tom and Ginny together, which could be used as a symbolism for their religious conflict over the baptism of fire that carries through the novel.



Chapter Three

Chapter Three Summary

As Ginny and Tom court, Ginny's brother, Locke, returned home on furlough from the army. He and his family sit around talking about many things, mostly religion, science, and medicine. Locke recounts the story of when he rode a train from Washington to San Francisco, eating only a wheel of cheese for the entire journey. He quickly ran out of food with days left in his journey and no more money in his pockets. He painstakingly watched as the woman sitting across from him ate fresh peach after peach from a giant bag. When she left, Locke sat for half a day staring at the bag, wondering when the woman was coming back for her fruit. Then he realized she must have forgotten it and spent the rest of his journey enjoying the fresh peaches, like they were an answer to his prayers. He also tells the story of a demon-possessed man he saw at a prison in the Philippines during his time in service. The man was literally crawling the walls, spitting out every curse word at the doctors in English, even though the staff medics swore the man had never been able to speak or understand English before his possession. One of the doctors cornered the possessed man and shouted, "You will come out!", demanding that the demon inside leave the man's body forever. After, the possessed man looked peaceful, smiling, and exhausted. He could no longer speak or understand English. After, Locke went to work on a ship full of soldiers dying from yellow fever and typhus. He spent his days cleaning up vomit, reading books about medicine, and praying, which he credits as the only reason why he made it out of there. He says he'll get married as soon as he finds someone willing to have him.

Chapter Three Analysis

In this chapter, Ginny's brother Locke is introduced. He is the only member of the Peace family that travels, even though he is traveling with the war. He has spent much of his time studying medicine and religion, and Ginny views him as a very educated man, which will come into play much later in the novel when Ginny writes to Locke for advice. It is clear in the exchanges with Locke that Tom does not like to talk about himself and struggles to keep up his end of a conversation. In the early chapters of the novel, Ginny finds this somewhat endearing, but this will change as time progresses. During his furlough, Locke tells the story of the demon possessed man who was speaking in tongues. This directly contradicts Ginny's view of speaking in tongues as a way of feeling closer to God, and will later fuel Tom's argument that Pentecostal worship, which encourages fits of the Spirit and speaking in tongues, is devil worship.



Chapter Four

Chapter Four Summary

Tom continues to visit the Peace house during his courting of Ginny. Ginny finds that Tom does not like many things, including staying up late, hunting, drinking, and most importantly: talking about himself. He prefers to sit and listen, which is fine with the Peace family, who likes to talk. As time passes, Ginny feels more and more attracted to Tom, especially his strong body which bulges with much-used muscles. One Sunday afternoon, Ginny takes Tom to Sunset Rock, the place she likes to go to be on her own, at one with nature. She is worried about the snakes getting to them, but feels somewhat calmed when Tom is around. As they sit on the rock, Tom asks about the land Ginny's family owns, ignoring all her other questions. As they are walking back to the house, Ginny sees shooting stars, bursting like flames in the sky. She realizes that these shooting stars are meteors, and some seem to shoot straight at them, which frightens her terribly. She starts screaming that it's the end of the world, the rapture, but Tom stands still as stone, not moved to panic like Ginny has done.

When Ginny has finished screaming about the rapture, she and Tom discuss religion. While Ginny is a devout Pentecostal, Tom doesn't believe everything he's read in the Bible but doesn't say much more about it. Ginny notes that this should have been a red flag to her, but when young couples are in love, they hear things they way they want to. She asks Tom if he thinks the meteors are a sign about their future and he says, "Could be." Those two words act as the couple's engagement, as they decide then and there to stay together forever. As they continue on, a snake attacks Tom's foot and he tries to stomp on it. Ginny continues screaming, but it is so dark she can't see what Tom is doing. As they reach the house, she sees that the copperhead snake's fangs got trapped in Tom's leather boot and he dragged it all the way back with him. His boot is covered in venom, which makes Ginny shiver.

Chapter Four Analysis

Here, it becomes clear what both Ginny and Tom desire in their relationship. Ginny, who has always felt awkward and unattractive is elated that a man as physically attractive as Tom wants to court her. Tom, who comes from a very poor family with no land of their own, is eager to have land he can call his own. Ginny feels somewhat uncomfortable discussing the land her father owns, but would give Tom anything he asked for. She is excited that Tom is thinking about the land, knowing that could bode well for her future with him as Tom has no land of his own. As the reader might expect in any moment of great importance between Ginny and Tom, in the moments before their engagement, the sky bursts into flames as meteors speed toward the earth. Ginny is terrified of the fire, but Tom stands calmly watching. This image could symbolize the whole of Ginny and Tom's relationship. As the world is falling apart, Ginny immediately thinks religiously - that the rapture is occurring, while Tom quietly contemplates what he can do to fix it.

This dynamic highlights both character's strengths and weaknesses, both as individuals and as a couple.



Chapter Five

Chapter Five Summary

Ginny remembers being fifteen, when everyone told her over and over that she would grow up to be a beautiful woman, meaning her awkward features would work themselves out as she aged. But as Ginny aged, she always looked the same, so she always thought she was ugly. As a teenager, she was confused why she hasn't yet started her period even though she was eighteen. She was deeply embarrassed whenever her sister or father would ask if everything was okay, as clearly they were worried about her development. Pa took Ginny to visit many different doctors about her lady problems. Her uncle, Dr. Johns, prescribed a tonic of whiskey for her to drink twice a day. Later, Pa drove Ginny down to see an Indian doctor. There, the doctor's wife, Madame Sparrow, read Ginny's fortune and told her she would have great happiness, deep sadness, and then great happiness again. She warned Ginny not to be afraid of change and not to plan ahead too far into her future. Then the doctor returned and sprinkled powder on Ginny, swathed her with feathers, and whispered a secret name only Ginny could call herself. He told Ginny to imagine she was a pigeon when she felt stressed - a pigeon flying above the earth looking down at all its problems. Then he gave Ginny a bottle of tonic, similar to the tonic from Dr. John, and sent her on her way.

Back at home, Ginny began taking the tonic. She felt heavy and tired. Soon that heaviness turned to pains in muscles, aches everywhere. Her skin turned stinging and itchy. Her family didn't think the tonic was working, but Ginny lay in bed and imaged herself as a pigeon flying above the earth, chanting her secret name to herself. One morning she woke with stickiness between her legs and blood stained into the bed sheets. She had finally started her period and knew that she wouldn't grow to be a barren woman.

Chapter Five Analysis

This chapter continues the image of Ginny as an awkward and unattractive teenager. This chapter functions to show the medicinal practices of the time, which will come into great importance later when both Ginny and Tom fall gravely ill. Also in this chapter, Ginny receives a spiritual guide from the Indian doctor. She now has a secret name she can call on when she feels afraid and an image to calm her: a pigeon flying in the sky.



Chapter Six

Chapter Six Summary

Ginny and Tom get married in Pa's house. None of Tom's family come down for the wedding because Tom claims they aren't very sociable people. The couple receives a crystal lamp from David and Lily, and one hundred dollars from Pa. The couple moves into Ginny's old bedroom in Pa's house. After the ceremony, Pa continues to try to leave the new couple alone, but it is clear Tom is uncomfortable with that and just wants to get to work, so he milks the cows and builds a fire minutes after taking off his dress clothes. After the family goes to bed, Ginny and Tom awkwardly sit alone at the fire. Then Ginny goes upstairs to turn down the bed while Tom goes out to the outhouse to relieve himself. To Ginny, it feels like he is gone for hours. When he returns, he turns off all the lights before taking his clothes off and climbing into bed with her. Once they are in bed, however, they find each other's bodies comfortably, giggling together as they explore.

Soon after the marriage, molasses season starts, which Ginny dreads. The entire process of making molasses is explained. Tom works hard, eager to show his worth within his new family. The yellow jackets are worse than ever, and Ginny constantly complains of being stung, although Tom, who is stirring the boiling pot of molasses that attracted the yellow jackets in the first place, has not been stung once. Jokingly, Ginny warns Tom repeatedly not to fall into the massive pot of boiling molasses. She is shocked then when she sees Tom lose his balance and fall, face-first into the boiling pot. He manages to save himself with his elbows, but is covered in sticky, boiling molasses that burns his skin. On top of that, the yellow jackets swarm him so it looks like he's wearing a shirt of bees. Panicked, Tom runs to the river and throws himself in. He has severe burns on his face, arms, and chest. In time, most of Tom's burns heal, leaving scars only on his elbows, which received the brunt of the burn. The family starts milling cider from the apples. Tom contributes greatly to the workload on the farm, building trails, springhouses, cider mills, a smokehouse, and a wash place for laundry. Ginny worries that her father might resent how much change Tom is making on the farm, but Pa is getting older and is content just to sit on the porch, drinking coffee, talking.

Chapter Six Analysis

In this chapter, Ginny and Tom are married. It is important to note that immediately after the ceremony, Tom wants to get to work on his new land, proving that he has earned his place in the family. This is interesting because even Ginny was not expecting such a reaction from her new husband, which causes some awkwardness and tension on their first married day. This reaction to marriage is important to characterizing Tom, who will later become an angry workaholic. This chapter also explores the deep sexual passion between Tom and Ginny. Although it doesn't seem that either character would be an experienced or exploratory lover, they are thrilled to discover their chemistry in bed and



clearly have no trouble pleasing each other. Although Tom rarely speaks in the daytime, he speaks to Ginny when they are alone in bed, both with his words and his body. It is clear to the reader now how this couple may thrive in marriage, even though it appears, at face value, that they have many problems to overcome. There is no doubting that Tom and Ginny are genuinely in love with each other and are not using each other for personal gains.



Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven Summary

Tom does not approve of Ginny's Pentecostal leanings and stiffens whenever she talks about religion around him. She tries to lure him to attend a revival with her, but he grows angry and silent no matter how hard she tries. She quotes Bible verses to him about the value of these revivals, but she snaps back with sarcastic comments or worse, silence. Tom thinks revival meetings encourage people to act like drunken fools. He remembers the Happyland Colony from his childhood: near to his home, a group of freed slaves started a colony that would worship with loud songs and dancing, speaking in tongues and prophesying. He also recalls blood and skulls, like voodoo and women taking off their clothes to dance naked around his house. Even though his mother warned him to stay away from those people, Tom snuck out one night to watch a service. There, he saw a woman work herself into such frenzy that she gave birth to a dead baby right then and there. He didn't think it was a miscarriage, but rather was murder.

After the marriage, it always interests Ginny who Tom does and doesn't like. She begins to notice that Florrie cannot keep her hands off Tom and is always telling him jokes so she can touch his shoulder or stomach when she gets to the punch line. Tom seems to like this attention. He cannot stand Joe's wife Lily, though. Lily often comes over wearing new dresses for Sunday services and digs for compliments on how nice she looks. She loves to talk about her religion and the services she's seen, which drives Tom crazy. Ginny knows that Lily's vanity comes from the fact that she was raised an orphan and never had any money, so this need for beautiful clothes covers up some emptiness from her childhood. Once, while the family is out picking huckleberries, Lily makes snide comments about how Tom can't read, always veiling them in a joke, but Tom is clearly embarrassed. When Pa's glasses go missing, Lily says, "Maybe that man who can't read took them," which enrages Ginny, but she does not say anything.

That same summer, all the boys - David, Joe, and Tom - go fishing. Tom had never been fishing before and is clearly nervous, so Ginny offers to tag along and keep him company. David, Florrie's husband, is very sick, pale, wasting away, and always coughing. After spending the day on the river without much luck, they are about to pack up their fishing poles when Tom has a tug on his line. It is a massive fish that pulls him into the river. After a long and arduous struggle, Tom manages to pull the fish into a sandbar where he can jump on it. When he does, everyone sees that the fish is over four feet long. Ginny thinks it looks like it is made of silver and rubies and emeralds.

Chapter Seven Analysis

This chapter introduces two major themes of the novel: Tom's fear of Pentecostal service and Florrie's flirtation with Tom. As a child, Tom had a very disturbing experience with a Pentecostal church of freed slaves. No matter what Ginny says to explain her



desire to worship this way, all Tom can picture in his mind is the dead baby that was miscarried during the service. This image is particularly important because later in the novel, after Ginny attends a prayer revival, she too miscarries her baby. Stemming from his fear of the Pentecostal church, Tom's relationship with his sister-in-laws are deeply affected by their own religious leanings. Tom cannot stand to be in the same room as Lily - a devout, if somewhat hypocritical - Christian who loves to talk about church services she's visited and preacher's she's heard sermonize. Tom has no patience for vanity, frivolity, or primness, all of which Lily exemplifies. He is clearly drawn to Florrie, who shares his opinion that there isn't much value in Pentecostal services. On top of that, Florrie is quick to laugh, is pretty to look at, and can work and drink like a man. Even though she is extremely jealous of their relationship, Ginny does not say anything to Tom about her insecurities about having Florrie around.



Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight Summary

Ginny gives birth to her first baby, a girl, Jewel. She says that everything was fine in her marriage until the first baby was born, then everything changed. Soon after Jewel is born, Ginny and her family prepare to go to another revival meeting. Tom agrees to attend with her. At the ceremony, the preacher is small and speaks quickly, but Ginny is enraptured. All around her, people begin speaking in tongues and the preacher, in turn, translates the messages from heaven. When Lily begins speaking in tongues, the preacher translates the message to say that there is someone who has stayed away from the church for too long and has become lukewarm. Ginny knows the preacher is speaking directly to her. She feels a heaviness pool in her chest and has to make her way to the aisle, clutching Jewel to her chest, to relieve it. She begins shouting to Jesus that her life is his, and then she, too begins speaking in tongues. When she reaches the altar, she turns to face the congregation and sees that Tom is horrified.

Tom chases Ginny down and snatches the baby away from her. Then he grabs her by the wrist and yanks her back toward the wagon. He is angrier than anyone Ginny has ever seen in her life. He says that if Ginny wants to go embarrassing herself, she should at least have the decency not to scare the baby. It's true that Jewel has been screaming, which made Ginny produce milk that leaked through her shirt, but she didn't realize it at the time. He accuses Ginny of not obeying the Bible by refusing to obey him when he says she can never come back to a revival again. Ginny says she doesn't have to obey her husband when he's been "blinded by greed". As soon as she says it, Ginny knows she's gone too far but she can't take it back. After that, Ginny and Tom reach new levels of hatred and spite for each other. They never speak, and Tom has moved his belongings up to the attic so he doesn't have to sleep with her. They hate everything about each other, and nothing either of them do is right. Ginny even goes so far as to keep the baby from him as way of punishment.

At the end of the summer, the revival preacher moved on down South and Ginny no longer attended the meetings. Months pass and Ginny no longer feels filled with the Spirit. One evening, while Tom is making his way to the ladder of the attic, Ginny is seized with lust for her husband. She slowly unbuttons her nightshirt so he can see from the reflection in the mirror. He comes to her and the two lie together in the same bed for the first time in months. Nine months later, their second child, a boy named Moody, is born. It appears that all the anger and resentment from the past months have melted away and Ginny and Tom have been given a fresh start in their marriage.

Chapter Eight Analysis

This chapter sparks the first of many fights between Ginny and Tom. Ginny hasn't been to a service since before she was married, never feeling like she had the time. But now,



she feels a deep desire to return to the revivals, like an unquenchable thirst. When Tom agrees to go with her, Ginny is delighted, thinking Tom will finally understand why these meetings are so important for her. Instead, Tom is mortified by what he sees and accuses Ginny of disobeying the Bible. The fact that Ginny also took their infant baby with her during her speaking in tongues clearly unleashed Tom's memories of the dead baby from the Happyland church of his childhood. Tom's fear about the Pentecostal church services is not completely out of religious belief that service should be solemn and sacred, but also stems from a fear of the loss of control Pentecostal services encourage. Seeing Ginny writhing on the ground, with milk spilling from her breasts, seemed animalistic to Tom, completely out of control and deeply embarrassing. Feeling cornered, Ginny accuses Tom of being greedy. This is the first time Tom's greed is acknowledged, but it will clearly come to the forefront of his character as the novel progresses. In this chapter, the heart of the conflict between Ginny and Tom is revealed: Tom's hatred for Ginny's spirituality and Ginny's hatred of Tom's greed. Even though they are able to patch up their differences at the end of this chapter, their issues and quarrels make up the plot of the rest of the novel.



Chapter Nine

Chapter Nine Summary

A family in town, the Brights, are hard hit by the typhoid that has been spreading. Three of the children and their mother are all killed by the disease, so the town preacher calls for a pound party in honor of the Brights family. At a pound party, each member of the congregation brings a pound of food - eggs, molasses, bread, coffee, etc - to the family in need. It is considered a spiritual duty to care for those less fortunate. Tom plans to bring a pound of molasses to the family and is annoyed when Ginny comes out with several jars of preserves and jelly, a cake, a canister of coffee, two dozen eggs, sheets and pillowcases, and some clothes she hadn't worn in a while. Tom thinks that if they deliver all these supplies, everyone will think they're putting on airs. Ginny thinks Tom's soul is crippled with greed. Tom stomps back into the house and resumes his separation in the attic. To make matters work, Florrie tells Tom that Ginny also gave the Brights fifteen dollars, which infuriates Tom who believes the money was his. He is wrong, though, as Ginny gave the family fifteen dollars of her own money which she had been saving for years. Ginny knows Tom enjoys being generous, as she once saw him give a bushel of potatoes to a neighbor, Ida Jenkins, after her husband died from smallpox. Ginny and Tom continue their fight, not speaking to one another.

A traveling preacher comes to stay with Joe and Lily as he is passing through town, and Ginny is disturbed to see the preacher has no possessions and is wearing threadbare clothes. Ginny sets out and makes the preacher two new shirts and handkerchiefs, and also gives him ten dollars from her savings. Of course Florrie runs to Tom to tattle on Ginny, making a special trip just to do so. Tom is furious and accuses Ginny of trying to ruin the family. She claims Tom has already been ruined by his greed. Soon after, Ginny realizes she is pregnant again. She goes through her entire pregnancy barely speaking to Tom. When her labor pains start, Tom leaves to fetch the midwife and Ginny feels called to walk to Sunset Rock, to get away and to think. Pa warns her to stay at home and wait for the midwife, but Ginny feels called to the wild.

As she is walking, Ginny feels overheated, sweaty, and in a lot of pain from the labor. She hears a voice calling to her from the tops of the trees saying, "Who are you?" When she looks up, Ginny can't see anyone. She begins to feel uneasy. Then, a dog comes out of the woods and onto the path. At first, Ginny thinks the dog is looking for something since its head is down, but then, as it gets closer, she sees that it's walking sideways, has glazed-over eyes, and foam pouring from its mouth. She is terrified as she's heard that looking at a mad dog while pregnant can lead to having mad babies. She wonders whether or not she can run while she's in labor. The pain is overwhelming and all she wants to do is sit down, but the dog has caught wind of her. It appears that the dog is blind from its rabies, and that it can't quite figure out where Ginny is. She slowly takes tiny steps away from the dog, and suddenly, she hears a loud crack. Pa has come with his shotgun and killed the dog. Ginny's labor pains are so bad she can't walk, but Pa forces her to her feet. The labor is difficult and Ginny knows something is



wrong. She feels like her insides are being torn up. During the labor, she concentrates on an emerald perfume bottle on the dresser, trying desperately to think about anything but the excruciating pain. It is no use, however. The baby dies moments after it is born. Ginny lies in bed for days after the death, feeling empty inside. She even refuses to go to the baby's funeral. While the family is out at the funeral, Ginny feels a spirit in the room with her. At first, she thinks it's the spirit of her dead baby that couldn't go on to heaven without being given a name. Soon though, she realizes it is not the spirit of her dead baby, but something far more sinister. It moves through the room with a cold chill, rustling the curtains, and knocking over the emerald perfume bottle. It gets close to Ginny and breathes into her ear. She can feel the spirit wrapping a net of razors around her while she screams. The screaming is interrupted by Tom, who comes running into the room, wondering what's wrong. In this moment, their marriage is once again patched.

Chapter Nine Analysis

This chapter explores the greed in Tom that Ginny claimed to despise in the previous chapter. Even though it is clear that Tom is not a complete Scrooge, he is not comfortable with Ginny handing out more than they can afford. He is willing to give away a pound of molasses and previously gave away a bushel of potatoes to Ida Jenkins. He is outraged when Ginny continues to give away food and money, thinking that she is literally taking food out of her children's mouths to feed the poor. Ginny believes that Tom is doing just enough to feel like he's doing his spiritual duty, but isn't going above or beyond the call, which is what the Spirit demands. Again, Tom's constraint and Ginny's excess lead to an argument. It can be recalled from earlier chapters that Ginny was always known to take in strays as a child, although now she cares for the needy partly out of spiritual duty and partly out of spite for Tom. It can also be recalled from earlier chapters that Tom came from very humble upbringings with no land and no father to make money for the family. It is possible that he is not greedy, just desperately trying to save everything so that his family will never be in need. It is clear that Tom does not hoard his money when it comes to his family - he is eager to put his money back into the farm and will buy his children anything they need.

This section also explores the continued presence of a supernatural being in Ginny's life. First, Ginny hears the spirit in the trees before she encounters the rabid dog. It is calling out to her, not in a comforting way. When the dog appears, it is as if that spirit has inhabited the dog's body, making the dog as mad as the man from the Philippians' jail Locke visited while he was in the army. While she looks at the dog, Ginny remembers stories of women giving birth to mad babies if they looked at a mad dog while pregnant, but even that would be better than what happened to her. When Ginny's baby is born, it dies soon after. During the funeral, the spirit again returns to Ginny, almost searching for the baby's soul. While lying in bed, Ginny could "hear the wind thrashing against itself, the way you can in a seashell" (p. 151). It stirs the curtains and circles around the bed whispering in Ginny's ear. Then it "crossed the room to the corner. It stayed there, like a bat hanging upsidedown, or a snake in a hole. I could feel it watching. Its eyes was on my mind. It was a hole in the air, a coldness. It was sucking

every think to itself" (p. 153). The fact that the demon knocks over and breaks the emerald perfume jar could again be a reference to greed being the work of the devil.



Chapter Ten

Chapter Ten Summary

Florrie and Lily come over to help Ginny can peaches. It is clear that neither Florrie nor Ginny want Lily's help as she can be annoying, but Ginny allows her to come anyway. When Lily arrives, she is wearing a nice dress, which she claims is an old frock, and peels only two peaches for each of Ginny's six. The conversation progresses awkwardly, with Florrie rolling her eyes at almost everything Lily says. Lily is a devout Christian, although it is clear she is somewhat hypocritical, which drives Florrie, who is not religious, crazy. Lily tells a long, boring story about losing her purse and making her husband, Joe, walk along the path toward church until he found it. As it turns out, the purse was not lost, but was mistakenly hidden underneath a pile of Lily's clothes. The women argue about many things, including religion, men, and their role as women. Although there is no real action in this chapter, it does a lot to characterize the three women and their relationship with each other.

Chapter Ten Analysis

There is not much plot in this chapter, and is simply in place to remind the reader of the conflicts between the sisters before the climax of the novel is reached. This chapter functions to remind the reader of Ginny's jealousy of Florrie's flirtatious nature, her ability to work and drink like a man, and her beauty. This chapter also highlights Florrie's disbelief in the Pentecostal church, a constant sore spot for Ginny. Lily is present in this scene to bond the two sisters together through their annoyance of her. Even though Ginny and Florrie have a lot of differences, which will come to a head later on in the novel, there is also something inexplicably binding them together.



Chapter Eleven

Chapter Eleven Summary

Tom and Ginny begin work to repair their marriage again. Now, the two spend their days working together in the fields, building the largest garden they've ever planted. Tom has planted a surplus of vegetables so he can sell them in town and on the other side of the mountain where new houses are being built. Every evening he comes home and counts his money by the fire, storing it in an old cigar box, gleefully watching the fruits of his labor grow. After Tom counts the money each evening, the two sit and talk about what they would like to spend that money on. Then they climb into bed and make love the way they did when they were first married. One evening while they are making love, Ginny feels transported away, like she's hovering over the earth and she thinks she hears herself speaking in tongues.

Soon after, Ginny discovers that she is expecting another baby. Although she is pleased, she is nervous because of how the last pregnancy ended. As the pregnancy progresses, she finds herself growing more and more irritable, especially when the older children are around. Moody and Jewel bicker all the time, and Moody has become fascinated with guns, shouting "Bang, Bang!", pretending to shoot everyone. The only place Ginny feels she can get some peace and quiet is in the outhouse, where she sometimes sits for long stretches of time simply enjoying the silence. After nine months, the baby is born - a boy named Muir after Tom's old boss. Soon after the birth, the midwife's family comes down with typhoid, so Ginny volunteers to house the rest of the midwife's children - those that didn't catch typhoid - until the others are well again. She invites the children over without discussing things with Tom, and when the children arrive, he is livid. He says that he doesn't want children that may be sick with typhoid in his house. Ginny, without thinking, snaps that it is not his house yet. Again, the closeness between them is broken and Tom resumes his silent treatment of Ginny.

Chapter Eleven Analysis

Ginny and Tom work, yet again, on repairing their marriage. It is clear that Tom feels guilty for not showing Ginny enough sympathy during her pregnancy and miscarriage. Ginny joins Tom in the fields and because she is working so closely beside him, she also begins to see the fields as dimes and quarters, not stalks of corn or rows of potatoes. This is a huge shift in Ginny's character as she realizes how important the farm is to Tom and his livelihood. She even adopts a bit of his money-mindedness, or greed, as she likes to call it. Later, Ginny will feel that she's sacrificed her own soul adopting Tom's mindset and that she's shunned the way of the church for the way of the world, but now, she is happy to be working side-by-side with her husband again. This connectedness also seeps into their love life as the couple makes love as if they were newlyweds again. It seems that nothing could break the newfound dedication to

marriage both Tom and Ginny have, but as the reader suspects, that reality is too good to be true.

The breaking point happens when the midwife's family falls ill with typhoid and Ginny offers to babysit some of the healthy children. Tom is outraged, thinking Ginny has brought typhoid into the house to infect his children. The introduction of typhoid in this chapter is important because it is the disease Tom will later die from, although he did not catch it from the midwife's children. Tom's outburst about caring for people with typhoid seems all the more ridiculous and cold hearted when he catches the illness himself. The reader may be on either of the character's side during this fight as it is somewhat dangerous to bring children, however healthy, from an infected home to live around small children during a time when there was no real cure for typhoid.



Chapter Twelve

Chapter Twelve Summary

Because he is so busy in the fields and Ginny has the new baby to look after, Tom hires Florrie to come in and help with the cleaning and washing everyday. He pays her one dollar a day, which infuriates Ginny. Soon after Florrie is hired, a new preacher comes to town for a brush arbor meeting. Ginny hasn't been to a revival in over two years and is desperate to go. When she arrives, she notices that the Gibson boys are standing around with rifles and she wonders if they've converted. During the service, it is clear that the Gibson boys, who hide in the darkness of the woods surrounding the tent, are there to disrupt service. They heckle and belch and do what they can to mock the Spirit. Suddenly, they begin shooting into the tent. Panicked, Ginny clutches Muir to her chest and she and Pa crawl to their wagon.

When Tom hears about the shooting at the revival, he is outraged that Ginny would put their baby in such danger. He forbids her to attend anymore meetings. Ginny doesn't listen. Tom's rage seems to grow in a way that pushes him to complete silence or indifference. Sometimes he makes cutting remarks to Ginny about her religion, but more often than not he ignores her completely, which actually makes Ginny feel worse. Florrie continues to come to the house to take care of the cleaning and Ginny often overhears her making inappropriate jokes with Tom, or making fun of Ginny's church behind her back. Then one day she follows Florrie inside the house to where Tom is removing his clothes for a bath. As if nothing is unusual, Florrie enters the room and begins talking and giggling with Tom. She even reaches out and rests her hand on Tom's naked chest. Ginny is stunned, but still convinces herself that nothing is going on between them.

Chapter Twelve Analysis

Ginny believes that sisters should help each other out of love, not profit. She often helped Florrie around her house without pay, so she doesn't think this agreement is fair. Secretly, she feels as though Tom is accusing her of being a bad housewife, or that maybe he hired Florrie so he can be close to her - she is always flirting with him and making him laugh. Ginny decides not to let her jealousy get the best of her, even though she still struggles to compliment Florrie when she does a good job around the house. Ginny's suspicion of something brewing between Tom and Florrie boils over when she sees Florrie flirting with Tom while he is washing himself. It is clear to anyone, including the reader, that this would be an appropriate time to confront both of them, but Ginny convinces herself that there is nothing going on between them: "What good was the revival Spirit if it couldn't soak out through the rest of my life too?" (p. 199). While she leans on her spirituality to forgive what she is seeing, the reader cannot help but wonder what really is stopping Ginny from barging through the door and confronting the couple. Is she really that forgiving? Or is she afraid of her fears being realized, and Tom actually leaving her for Florrie?



When she visits the brush arbor meeting, Ginny wonders if the Gibson boys, who stand outside with their guns, have been converted. On the surface, when the Gibson boys begin shooting into the tent, the initial symbolism of the act is that this extreme religion is dangerous in Ginny's life. As the novel progresses, however, this scene is extreme foreshadowing to the moment when Tom pulls the gun on Ginny and shoots at her on her way to the revival. Even though Ginny does not believe in predestination, it is clear that Robert Morgan is making a statement that some people or "savable" and some, like the Gibson boys and Tom, are not, no matter how hard Ginny tries to convert them.



Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Thirteen Summary

Winter sets in and it is already colder than anyone remembers. Moody has become obsessed with imaginary outlaws hiding behind the barn that he wants to shoot, but Ginny won't let him outside in the freeze. Even though it's freezing out, there is much laundry to do and Tom offers to get Florrie. Protectively, Ginny insists on doing the laundry herself, not wanting Florrie to take that away from her as well. She and Tom fight outside about who should be doing the laundry in the freeze, and eventually Ginny wins. After, she isn't sure she has the strength to make it back to the house. When she does, her face is completely void of color and everyone is worried. Still insisting that she isn't sick, Ginny collapses as Tom brings her to bed. The next few days are a blur for Ginny as people come in and out of her room, coaxing her to drink whiskey sweetened with sugar for her strength. Florrie comes to stay with the family for the entire week Ginny is sick, taking care of the children, doing all the washing and cooking, and nursing Ginny back to health. Ginny vomits uncontrollably and coughs thick plates of mucus from her lungs. She is nearly delusional, speaking in a way no one can understand. Through the window, Ginny feels someone is watching her, and she sees a beautiful white light in the distance. She knows it is the Holy Spirit keeping an eye on her and she is stricken with guilt for not praying more. Five days later, Ginny's fever finally breaks. When she wakes, Florrie is there proudly saying that she's weaned Muir from breast milk and he's eating solids now. When Ginny sees Florrie and Tom speaking softly to each other in the corner, too close to be casual, and when she sees Ginny's hand come to rest on Tom's arm and linger there, she is rigid with anger.

Chapter Thirteen Analysis

Ginny has realized that the best way to fight with Tom is to plaster a smile on her face while they are fighting, no matter what she is saying. This is the way she wins the argument with him about who will do the laundry during the coldest winter of their lives. In a way, Ginny feels as if she is fighting for her place in the family - she doesn't want Florrie taking over everything. She feels as if Tom is accusing her of being a bad mother and housekeeper and now she can prove to him, herself, and to Florrie, that she doesn't need any help. Ginny takes great pride in washing the laundry that day, savoring the chill that freezes her lungs and she breathes, knowing she has won a small victory against Tom. She looks at the white snow and feels pure and happy. The washing takes her all day, and when she finishes, she heads to the chicken coop to collect the eggs. There, she feels strangely weak and begins sneezing. She is gravely ill and needs everyone's help to get well again. While she is in her fits of fever and delirium, Ginny is once again visited by a supernatural light watching over her through the window. This spirit is much more comforting than the evil spirit that visited her after the miscarriage. Ginny believes this spirit has come to look after her and remind her to continue her



prayers. Later, Ginny dismisses the thought of a spirit visitor by claiming what she saw was the light streaming through ice on the windows.

When she wakes from her fever, the first thing Ginny notices is the way Tom and Florrie treat each other. They have become closer during her illness and she can no longer forgive them for their flirtation. She feels as if Florrie has taken advantage of her, taking over the house while she was sick, as if to prove to Tom that he had married the wrong sister. She is extremely jealous when she hears that the baby has been weaned and no longer needs her. She feels replaced, as if Tom could easily move on to a life with Florrie without any problem. When Florrie comes into the room Ginny finally confronts her about her relationship with Tom, but Florrie dismisses her as still be feverish.



Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fourteen Summary

Ginny continues to heal and begins taking on much more of her own housework. When Florrie keeps coming to help, Ginny becomes more and more annoyed. Finally, she snaps, accusing Florrie of trying to steal her husband. Then she tells Florrie to leave her house and that they don't need her help anymore. When Tom finds out what Ginny has done, he seems to sense the truth behind Ginny's anger and doesn't say anything. He returns to sleeping in her bed. For the next few weeks, it continues to snow. Even though the effects of her pneumonia last for weeks after Ginny breaks her initial fever, she soon realizes that she is pregnant again. Soon after announcing the news, Ginny feels the urge to attend another revival. Tom adamantly demands that she stay home, but Ginny will not listen. He physically grabs her by the wrist and stands in the doorway blocking her way, which frightens Ginny. She manages to spin away from him and march determinately toward the tent. She hears a shot behind her and sees that Tom is standing in the doorway, pointing a shotgun at her. He demands that she get back in the house where she belongs. Ginny refuses and bravely keeps walking all the way to the church, refusing to turn around when the shotgun continues to fire.

Chapter Fourteen Analysis

Ginny cannot believe the way the snow is piling up on everything. Although it is beautiful, there is also a lot of danger in the snow. Many homes and barns in the neighborhood have caved in under the weight of the snow or burned to the ground when the fireplaces became jammed with soot. Ginny has also heard stories of people freezing to death inside their own homes, as wood becomes more and more scarce and people are forced to warm themselves with liquor. Ginny finally fully confronts her sister and fires her, claiming her place once and for all in the family no matter how difficult the work is. Surprisingly, Tom has little reaction to the news that Florrie has been fired, and the reader is left wondering if he truly doesn't mind that Florrie is gone or if he is covering something up with his apathetic reaction.

In this chapter, the climax of the novel is reached. Both tensions in Ginny's life boil over - her tension with Florrie and her tensions with Tom. Whenever Tom returns to Ginny's bed and the couple begins working on their marriage, it is safe for the reader to assume that conflict is just around the corner. For Ginny and Tom, that conflict happens when Ginny finds out she is pregnant again and wants to attend a revival. Tom is furious that she would put another one of their babies in danger. It is clear that he has not forgotten the trauma of the miscarriage at the Happyland church, nor has he fully recovered from the loss of his baby a few years earlier. His own fears and need for control lead him to get his father-in-law's shotgun and fire it at his pregnant wife as she walks away. It is unclear whether or not he fired at Ginny or just around her, but by the way Ginny repeatedly says, "Put that thing up," it is safe to assume that he has at least pointed it



directly at her. Ginny refuses to stay home and marches proudly to the church. Even after she reaches the church safely, she can still hear the shotgun in the distance and thinks it sounds like war on the hillside, which is an apt description of the conflict between herself and Tom: it is a war of spirit, pride, control, and strength.



Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Fifteen Summary

This chapter is written completely as a letter to Locke from Ginny. It takes her over a week to write and spans eleven printed pages. In it, Ginny asks for Locke's memories of their mother. Even though Locke is younger than Ginny, he was far closer to their mother than she was. Ginny remembers that her mother, like Tom, hated the tent revivals and would grow angry when Pa wanted to attend. Ginny hopes that Locke remembers what it was exactly that so infuriated their mother, so she can try to get an insight into Tom's anger. Ginny remembers her mother sitting stubbornly silent through a dinner where Pa had invited a traveling preacher to join them for a meal. She remembers her parents shouting at each other about the revivals and remembers her mother storming away from a church sing-along when he heard that the revival preacher would be leading the singing. In the letter, Ginny recalls all the passions she's had in her life, and how some of them, like reading and worshiping, have just stuck. They are apart of her, and why can't Tom understand that?

Chapter Fifteen Analysis

While she is writing the letter to Locke it is clear that Ginny feels overwhelmed with work and that she probably could use some help from her sister. But Ginny finds comfort in the monotony of work, knowing that it means she is needed in her own home and cannot be quickly replaced. Ginny writes to Locke as a way of thinking on paper, questioning what he remembers about their mother and her aversion to the Pentecostal church. Ginny hopes that Locke, who she considers to be the wisest and most educated of her siblings, might have some insight into how she can convert Tom, which she still sees as a mission in her marriage. In the letter, she also reveals that their father had an affair with a woman on the other side of the mountain and, years ago, fathered a half brother for Ginny and Locke, but there is no other real discussion about the matter. Although this issue is never mentioned again and does not affect the plot of the novel, it is interesting to note that Pa, who considers himself to be a strictly religious man, would have an affair, father a child, and then abandon it. It is clear now that there is a high level of hypocrisy in the Peace family, just as Florrie suspected.



Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Sixteen Summary

Tom comes home from the fields clearly bothered as he has realized that someone has been cutting timber from the outskirts of their land. After deliberating and discussing every possible reason why the wood might be missing, the family realizes that it is the Johnson family, who owns the land on the other side of the mountain, that has been pushing the line between their properties. When the men meet each other, Tom and Pa are horrified to see that Thurman and his boys have pulled out all the property stakes marking where the Peace family's land ends and the Johnson's begins. They know it will be much harder to prove that the land was theirs first. When she hears this, Ginny becomes dead-set on hiring a lawyer, at any cost, to preserve her family's land. Even though she is nervous with the hustle and bustle of the big city, she and her father make their way into town and meet with Lawyer Gibbs, and old family friend.

Gibbs asks to see the family's deed and is disappointed with they can only produce a bill of sale, which won't hold up in court, especially since Johnson removed all the property markers. Ginny doesn't understand what the problem is, clearly uneducated when it comes to law, and tries to pay the lawyer then and there to sort things out. The lawyer is somewhat annoyed with Ginny and speaks only to Pa. Gibbs agrees to send a cease and desist letter to the Johnsons and to take the case to court when the proper paperwork can be produced. As soon as Gibbs sends the cease and desist letter to the Johnsons, the Peace's receive one of their own from the Johnson's lawyer. The next day, Pa, Tom, and Ginny make their way around the entire property, pounding property stakes back into the land. While they are walking, Ginny notices a bloody bandanna on the ground and wonders where it came from. A few days later, the Peace family receives the news that Thurman Johnson died after having a stroke while chopping wood and falling on his axe. Ginny remembers the bloody bandanna she saw in the woods. Now that their father is dead, the Johnson boys have no intention of continuing the land battle with the Peaces and write a letter of apology.

Chapter Sixteen Analysis

The Johnsons had been feuding with the Peace family for many generations, but the feud had been quiet for almost thirty years. It is clear, now, that Thurman Johnson is determined to get back the land he believes is his, even though the government has granted it to the Peace family. When she hears this, Ginny is so angry that night that she has a terrible dream in which she confronts Thurman Johnson and demands, in the name of Jesus, that he and his family leave her land alone. When Thurman refuses, stating that they're all working for Jesus, Ginny lifts her gun and fires. The next morning, Ginny is nervous to see that Tom and Pa both pack their guns in the wagon when they travel to confront Thurman about the land. The dream symbolizes Ginny's profound connection to the land, which she must protect at any cost. There is a parallel between



the way Ginny feels about the land to the way she feels about her family. It is clear now that while Ginny was soft in the beginning of the novel, living with Tom has hardened her and she will do anything to protect what is hers, including turning on her own sister in a time of need. The reader is reminded again of the quote from the first revival Ginny attended where the preacher said, "You've got to fight fire with fire. Just like you caseharden a nail to make it stronger, or fire a pot in the fiery furnace to make it last. It takes the second baptism to see you through" (p. 6). Clearly, her marriage to Tom has been like a baptism of fire for Ginny and she has come out stronger and harder on the other side.

The scenes in which Pa walks through his land with Tom and Ginny is important in that it shows the deep historical connection the Peace family has to their land. The land is full of generations of memories and that is something worth fighting for when it is threatened. Even without a map or compass, Pa knows his way around the land, and knows exactly where each stake should be place, even the parts of the land Ginny has never seen before. As the walk, Pa tells Tom and Ginny all the memories he has of the land, making it clear how heartbroken he would be if the land were to be lost. It becomes clear to Ginny that this land is also where Tom feels most at home. It is a spiritual place for him, where he feels useful and at one with the world. The land is like Tom's church, and Ginny realizes that it must be fought for with the save vigor with which she fights for her own spirituality.



Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Seventeen Summary

Ginny's next baby, a girl named Fay, is born in October. She is the smallest baby and Ginny knows she will be the last. She and Tom still are not really speaking as Ginny is not interested in forgiving him since he pulled a gun on her. One day, Tom comes running into the house shouting that the pastures are on fire. Ginny gives the baby to Jewel and rushes out to help fight the fire. When she gets to the pasture, Ginny sees Pa standing with a pine switch, trying to swat away the fire. She worries that he is too old to be doing such dangerous work and shouts for him to go back inside. Pa refuses. Feeling torn between helping Tom and watching Pa, Ginny reluctantly leaves Pa and runs to help Tom shovel sod onto the fire, trying to dig a ditch that will stop the flames. The wind changes again and pushes the fire back where it came from, circling back toward Pa. Ginny runs to find him, to make sure he's okay, only to find that the children have left the safety of the house, all in tears, searching for her. She gruffly grabs the children and pushes them to safety, then runs to the woods searching for Pa. She saves him and runs back to the fields only to discover that the fire is completely out of control and Tom has worked himself sick.

Chapter Seventeen Analysis

Even though Ginny is not interested in forgiving Tom after he pulled a gun on her while pregnant, the couple reaches their real "baptism of fire" when their land, the only thing holding them together as a couple, goes up in flames. A spark from the furnace caught some of the dry grass on fire, and soon the whole pasture was up in flames. When she runs out to the fields, Ginny can hardly see through the smoke, but she works side-by-side with Tom, digging. This is clear metaphor for their marriage - at times, the fire, or conflict in their lives is so large that they cannot see what they are doing, but somehow, they continue to work side by side trying to salvage what they can of their lives together. Although the image of the fire is horrifying, there is also something beautiful about the way Tom and Ginny wordlessly work together trying to save what is theirs.

The wind continues to change, pushing the wind in different directions, and it is clear the fire is well past their control. When the wind pushes the fire back toward Pa, Ginny runs to save him and finds that he is crouching in the stream, sprinkling water on himself as protection from the encroaching flames. Risking her own safety, Ginny runs to him. They cannot breathe through the smoke and feel as if they are choking to death. Ginny wets her apron in the stream and they breathe through that. Soon, the fire passes over them and Ginny and Pa are able to crawl to safety. Leaving Pa with the children, she runs back to the fire searching for Tom. She finds him there, shoveling manically, with Joe. Tom's face is completely black with soot and he is sweating profusely. Ginny doesn't even recognize him. She tries to tell him to rest, to drink some water, but he refuses. When it is clear that the fire is past fighting, Tom nears collapse. His face has gone

ghostly white underneath the soot and he looks as if he can't stand up. Slowly, he drags his body back to the house.



Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Eighteen Summary

After the fire, Tom makes his way to the outhouse and stays in there for over a half hour. When that time passes, Ginny worries and walks out to check on him. He moans through the door that he is sick and can't get up. With Joe's help, Ginny manages to pull Tom from the outhouse and get him to the house, where she undresses and bathes him. She burns some whiskey in a jar and forces him to drink it for strength. She also gives him blackberry juice to try to flush the sickness from him. The whole time, his fever gets worse and worse, until Ginny feels like his forehead is a stove. Soon after, a letter arrives in the mail from Locke. In it, he questions whether or not Ginny has ever tried to understand what is important to Tom, and if she appreciates all the gifts he has given her in marriage. When the doctor comes he says Tom has typhoid, despite Ginny's assertion that it is not typhoid season. The doctor insists that if Ginny wants to save Tom, she must keep the house completely dark and silent and give Tom regular doses of whiskey mixed with honey.

One night while Ginny is caring for Tom, she hears a knocking on the window. The knocking continues, persistently, along the length of the house, circling around her. The knock happens at regular intervals but Ginny cannot see what is causing it as all the windows have been curtained shut. When she stands, determined to put an end to the knocking, Tom wakes from his sleep and begs her not to leave him. Then he begins writhing in a fever seizure and Ginny pours whiskey over his chest to try to cool him. Sometime during the seizure, the knocking stops and Ginny convinces herself that it was just the wood planks of the house settling to the new cool of autumn. Despite Ginny's round the clock care, Tom continues to weaken. When Ginny presses his wrists, she can barely find his pulse. His body looks completely wasted away. After giving him one last drink of whiskey and a whiskey rub, Ginny falls asleep next to him, thinking how "service is also praise". When she wakes, Tom is dead.

Chapter Eighteen Analysis

Initially, when Tom is sick, he claims to have Cholly Morbis, a sickness that comes from overheating, which is also the sickness that killed his grandfather. Determined to do it all on her own, Ginny refuses help from her family, especially from Florrie, when she comes to help. Word spreads about Tom's sickness and the neighbors regularly come over to buy molasses and corn, staying far away from the house. The sickness leads to great weakness that gnaws away at Tom's body and causes terrible fever. With the fever, Tom begins speaking, with his eyes closed in sleep, clearly out of it. He curses Ginny and her religion, calling this the "baptism of fire". He laughs demonically and speaks to his dead mother. Even though Tom curses her, Ginny does not listen to him. She feels as if he is a child she is caring for, not her grown husband. She continues to bathe him in whiskey and to cover his body in poultices. While she is caring for him,



Ginny is once again visited by a spirit that knocks on the windows and around the frame of the house. This is the third time an evil spirit has come visiting her, and all have come at times of death: in the form of the rabid dog, the spirit after the miscarriage, and now that Tom nears death. Just as the evil spirit possessed the rabid dog and made it mad, so too does this spirit seem to enter Tom during his fever, causing him to curse Ginny and her religion and later, when the knocking mysteriously stops, to go into fits of seizures. His breath comes thinner and thinner, and his lips begin to turn blue. The doctor is of no help, insisting that Ginny just continue to give Tom more whiskey. Ginny tries to heat the fever out of him by heating up stones and bricks in the fire and packing them under the bed. Pa says Tom's coughing sounds like a death rattle. The coughing continues but it sounds like Tom is trying to breathe underwater. Soon after the seizure, Tom is dead.



Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Nineteen Summary

When Ginny sees that Tom is dead, she doesn't know what to do with herself. All she wants to do is crawl into bed next to him one last time and pretend it never happened. In the moments after Tom's death, she goes through the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Suddenly, she thinks about the money Tom hoarded and begins searching the room for it. She finds the money rolled and stacked in the cigar box at the back of the wardrobe. Also in the cigar box is the whale bone button from Tom's father's confederate army uniform and a newspaper clipping about his marriage to Ginny. She never knew he had saved those artifacts. Ginny also thinks about all the things she won't be able to do on the land now that Tom is gone and that her boys are far too young to begin farm work. In the cigar box is over \$400, enough to keep her and the family afloat at least for a few seasons. In the end, Ginny doesn't wake any of her family members, knowing they'll have plenty of time to share in the grief with her.

Chapter Nineteen Analysis

In the moments after Tom's death, Ginny goes through the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. She prays long and hard for God to bring Tom back to life, and is genuinely disappointed when she reaches for the pulse at Tom's neck and finds there is nothing there, that his skin has gone cold. From there, Ginny gets angry at Tom for courting her, making her fall in love with him, stealing her youth, and leaving her alone to care for their land and children. Tears spring to her eyes as she recalls all the things she hated about Tom: his boots left by the fireplace, his hoarded money, the way he sat silently through conversations never having an opinion about anything.

Shortly before Tom's death, a letter from Locke arrives. In it, he apologized for not writing sooner. He explains that, as humans, we cannot understand each other's ecstasies. Just as Tom cannot understand Ginny's ecstasy with the church, neither can she understand his ecstasy in the woods. He pleads with Ginny to try to save her marriage by appreciating the gifts Tom brought to her and her family. When Ginny remembers this she starts weeping, realizing that all the things she hated about Tom are also the things she loved about him. She realizes Locke was right: she had refused to accept Tom's gifts. When she thinks of the land Tom gave his life working and the money he hoarded away, she realizes that Tom did everything for her benefit and for the benefit of their family, and this was his final gift to her. As she lies next to Tom's dead body, she sees that loving Tom truly was her greatest act of service and worship and in that, she realizes her truest pleasure.



Characters

Ginny Peace

Ginny Peace begins the novel as an awkward teenager with dark hair and eyes, large hands a feet, and a love of books. When she has her first experience with Spirit possession at a Pentecostal church service, she finds that this type of worship is her new passion. There are never any problems with her religion until she marries Tom Powell and starts a family with him. Tom does not approve of Ginny's Pentecostal worship and forbids her from attending the services any longer. Ginny defiantly continues to attend the services, which leads to many problems in her marriage. Ginny accuses Tom of being greedy and controlling, while he accuses her of being a devil worshiper. Ginny continues to attend the meetings until her third pregnancy ends in a miscarriage. Before the miscarriage, Ginny is nearly attacked by a rabid dog, which could be a symbol for the devil. During the baby's funeral, Ginny is visited by an evil spirit that appears to have come to collect the baby's soul. As the novel progresses, Ginny moves back and forth between desperately needing the church revivals and desperately trying to save her marriage. It is clear she can only have one at a time - her faith or her marriage, which is Ginny's greatest conflict to overcome in the novel. At the end, Ginny discovers that she can have both - that caring for her husband is an act of worship and praise. By the time she discovers this, however, it is too late - her husband is dead. In the moments after his death, Ginny realizes that loving him and creating a life together truly has been her truest pleasure.

Tom Powell

Tom Powell is a quiet man who comes from a poor family in North Carolina. He is described as being stocky, strong, perpetually red-faced from working in the fields, with a strong mouth framed by a blond mustache. He meets and marries Ginny Peace, pleased that in marrying her he stands to inherit her father's hundreds of acres of farmland. Because Tom grew up with a poor family and a father who was killed during the Civil War, Tom does not have any land of his own. When he marries Ginny, Tom immediately sets to work on her father's land, greatly improving the productivity of the land and making more money from the land than anyone in the family expected. It is clear that Tom is a workaholic and that he hoards his money, although it is unclear whether he does so out of control or out of fear for the future. The relationship between Tom and the Peace family begins to unravel when his wife, Ginny, starts attending Pentecostal revivals again. Tom is deeply embarrassed by Ginny's loss of control during these meetings, and he fears that Ginny is putting their children at risk through her worship. He remembers watching the worship service of a Pentecostal church of freed slaves when he was a boy: the women stripped off all their clothes and danced naked around a fire, and one woman even went into labor during the ceremony, giving birth to a dead baby. To Tom, these Pentecostal services are akin to devil worship. Throughout the fights with his wife, Tom continues to work hard on the land, putting all his work and



effort into the farm. Eventually, Tom works himself to death when a fire breaks out and everything Tom has worked so hard for is threatened. He gives everything he can to fighting the fire, but he loses. The land is destroyed and his body is too weak to recover from the strain of the fight. He dies shortly after the fire from complications of cholera morbus and typhoid.

Florrie Peace

Florrie Peace is Ginny's older sister. She is described as tall, beautiful, flirtatious, and funny. Everywhere she goes, attention follows her. Florrie is the only member of the Peace family that does not believe in the power of Pentecostal revivals, and her faith in general is questioned throughout the novel. This ambiguity of religion draws Florrie and Tom together to form a bond outside of his bond with his wife, Ginny. When this happens, all of Ginny's teenage insecurities come back when she questions whether or not Tom believes he married the wrong sister.

David

David is Florrie's husband. Although he is present in most of the family scenes - he loves to hunt and fish with his brothers-in-law - he begins to disappear from the story halfway through when he falls ill. His illness is never described in detail and is never explained, so it remains a mystery in the novel. All that is said is that David begins to grow weak and cough uncontrollably. It is hinted at that he suffers from TB. His sickness and physical weakness is another reason why Ginny suspects Florrie is attracted to Tom, who is physically very strong and could take care of her if David were to die.

Joe Peace

Joe is Ginny's older brother who suffers from a stutter. Like Ginny, Joe is a devout Pentecostal. He spends his days in the woods praying.

Lily Peace

Lily is Joe's husband. She is considered to be very prim, vain, and hypocritical. She is a devout Pentecostal and loves to talk about the preacher's she's heard sermonize and the revivals she's attended. Whenever she goes to church, Lily always wears a new dress. Ginny suspects this is because Lily was raised as a war orphan and now displays her wealth proudly, even though she and Joe aren't very wealthy.

Thurman Johnson

Thurman Johnson and his family live on the other side of the mountain that divides the property line with the Peace family. For many generations the Johnson family has



fought with the Peace family about the property divide, and when Tom moves in, Thurman Johnson begins cutting timber from the Peace property. He and his sons pull up all the property spikes in the hopes of claiming back land they say is theirs. During the property battle, Thurman Johnson has a stroke and falls on his axe, mortally wounding himself.

Dr. Johns

Dr. Johns is Mama's brother who became a doctor. He is small and unmarried, and the only medicine he ever prescribes is whiskey. He prescribes whiskey concoctions to Ginny when she is a teenager and hasn't yet started menstruation, when Ginny is ill with pneumonia, and when Tom has typhoid. All three times, his concoctions fail. He has also been known to drink as much whiskey as what he prescribes to his patients.

Dr. Match

Dr. Match is the Indian Doctor Ginny visits when Dr. Johns' whiskey prescription fails to bring on menstruation. He prescribes Ginny a stronger version of the concoction in a tiny clay jar shaped like a face. This time, the concoction works. Dr. Johns also gives Ginny a secret name that only she should call herself and tells her that when she feels stressed out, she should imagine she is a pigeon flying above the earth.

Robert Montgomery

Robert Montgomery is the freed slave that starts the Happyland colony of Pentecostals that traumatized Tom when he was a boy.

Ben Peace

Ben Peace, also known as Pa, is the patriarch of the Peace family. His wife died when his children were young and he dedicated his life to their land and raising their family. It is hinted at in the novel that he had an affair and fathered a son on the other side of the mountain, but nothing much comes of this fact. Ben is a devout Pentecostal and often brought his children to services when they were teenagers.

Locke Peace

Locke is the youngest of the Peace children and is very rarely mentioned in the novel. He is in the army working as a nurse, and was present at the exorcism of a demonized prisoner in the Philippines. Working as a nurse in the war, Locke spends all his time studying medicine and religion. When Ginny struggles with her own life and marriage, she reaches out to Locke for advice because she considers him to be the most educated person she knows.



Objects/Places

Brush Arbor

Brush Arbors are small tiki hut-like tents that are built in the woods for Pentecostal worship services. The services are typically held in these types of buildings because they are of the earth - with thatched roofs and sawdust floors.

Pentecost

Pentecost is the day Christians celebrate as the day when the Holy Spirit came down from heaven in the form of tongues of flame that hovered above the heads of the disciples. The tongues of flame caused people to speak in tongues, write on the ground filled with the spirit, and caused outsiders to believe these people were drunk. At Pentecostal services, like the ones Ginny attends, these behaviors are encouraged as signs of the Holy Spirit's presence.

Sunset Rock

Sunset Rock is Ginny's favorite place on her property. It is the place she so named as a child, on the west side of the property overlooking where the sun sets. This is the place where she and Tom decided to get engaged and also the place she tried to reach while pregnant for the third time when she was attacked by the rabid dog.

The Happyland Colony

The Happyland Colony is a Pentecostal church started by a group of freed slaves. This church was formed near Tom's childhood home and traumatized him when he was growing up. Despite his mother's objections, Tom sneaked out to watch a service and was horrified when the women stripped off their clothes and began dancing around the fire. That horror grew to terror when one of the women went into labor during the service and delivered a dead baby.

Glasses

This is what Pa loses before the family goes out huckleberry picking. The whole family spends time searching for glasses because he says he cannot pick without them. During the search, Lily accuses "that man who can't read" of stealing them, meaning Tom Powell. Ginny is shocked that Lily, a Christian, would speak this way about her husband. It is Tom, in the end, who finds the glasses in the straw in the back of the wagon.



Typhoid

Typhoid is a disease that claimed many lives during the time in which this novel is set. When the midwife's children fall ill with typhoid, Ginny volunteers to babysit the healthy children until the disease passed. Tom was outraged with this decision and thought Ginny was putting their children's lives at risk. Typhoid is also the disease the eventually claimed Tom's life.

Cholly Morbis

Cholly Morbis is a sickness that comes from overheating. It usually affects babies who get too hot with fever, and it can easily kill them. This is the sickness that Tom claims killed his grandfather and what Tom believes he is suffering from after the fire when he cannot control his body and has no strength.

Whiskey

This is what the doctors in the novel regularly prescribe to their patients, regardless of age, gender, or ailments. This is what Ginny is given to bring on her periods when she is a teenager, and it is also what she rubs over Tom's body when he is sick with typhus.

The Rabid Dog

This is what attacks Ginny when she goes to sit at Sunset Rock while she is in labor. When she sees it, she sees that it isn't exactly a cur, but also wasn't exactly like a bulldog. It was walking sideways, waving from one side of the trail to the other. It was wobbling, walking with its head down. Since it had already gone blind from the rabies, it sniffed the air to find where Ginny was standing. Ginny fears that something will happen to her baby, since she has heard stories of other women giving birth to possessed babies after seeing a rabid dog while pregnant.

The Dark Spirit

The Dark Spirit is what comes to Ginny on the day of her baby's funeral. At first she thinks it is the soul of her dead baby, but soon she sees that it has darker motivations for coming. It is the same spirit that was in the room when Ginny lost the baby and that knocked over the emerald perfume glass on her bedside table. The spirit hung like a bat upside down, watching Ginny and made her sick to her stomach.



Themes

The Baptism of Fire

The Baptism of Fire is an important element in the Pentecostal religion and this saying makes many appearances at the revival meetings Ginny and her father attend. During the first revival Ginny attends, the preacher announces that "You've got to fight fire with fire. Just like you caseharden a nail to make it stronger, or fire a pot in the fiery furnace to make it last. It takes the second baptism to see you through" (p. 6). The baptism of fire is also seen as symbolism for Ginny's relationship with Tom - at every major event in their lives together, there is an image of fire present. First, when the couple meets, after a narrow escape from the bull, it begins to rain. Ginny and Tom run full speed to the nearest tree, soaked through with rain. They watch with a mixture of excitement and fear as strikes of lighting crash into nearby trees, setting them ablaze. Then, before they decide to become engaged, the sky bursts into flames as meteors speed toward the earth. Ginny is terrified of the fire, but Tom stands calmly watching. Finally, the couple reaches their real "baptism of fire" when their land, the only thing holding them together as a couple, goes up in flames. A spark from the furnace caught some of the dry grass on fire, and soon the whole pasture was up in flames. When she runs out to the fields, Ginny can hardly see through the smoke, but she works side-by-side with Tom, digging. This is clear metaphor for their marriage - at times, the fire, or conflict in their lives is so large that they cannot see what they are doing, but somehow, they continue to work side by side trying to salvage what they can of their lives together. Although the image of the fire is horrifying, there is also something beautiful about the way Tom and Ginny wordlessly work together trying to save what is theirs.

Control

The theme of control is seen throughout the marriage of Ginny and Tom and arguably leads to all their conflicts as a couple. Tom needs to control everything around him, especially his land - as time passes he no longer ever asks permission from Pa to make changes to the farm. Tom's need for control is juxtaposed with Ginny's desire to lose control at her Pentecostal meetings, which infuriates Tom. To Tom, Ginny's loss of control at the Pentecostal meetings is akin to devil worship, and reminds him of the Happyland Colony meeting he witnessed as a child, when he watched a woman give birth to a dead baby. Ginny, on the other hand, views Tom's need for control as being blinded by greed. Both of them use the theme of control, or lack of control, to justify their hatred for each other. Shortly before Tom's death, a letter from Locke arrives. In it, he explains that, as humans, we cannot understand each other's ecstasies. Just as Tom cannot understand Ginny's ecstasy, or loss of control with the church, neither can she understand his ecstasy, or control over the land, in the woods. Locke pleads with Ginny to try to save her marriage by appreciating the gifts Tom brought to her and her family, but by the time she realizes this truth, it is too late, Tom is dead.



Supernatural Presence

There are at least four instances of supernatural presence in the novel: First when Ginny hears the voice calling to her from the trees while she is being stalked by the rabid dog. Again when she is feverish and can see the light from the Holy Spirit reflected through the ice at her window. Again when she miscarries the baby and feels the devil's presence like a bat swooping around her bedroom, and again before Tom dies when Ginny hears the knocking on the walls of the house. Each time, Ginny finds a logical explanation for the occurrences, but it is clear that even she doesn't believe her own explanations. Each time there is a death in the family, Ginny seems to be visited by an evil spirit - in the form of the rabid dog, the bat-like creature, and the knocking on the walls. Just as the evil spirit possessed the rabid dog and made it mad, so too does this spirit seem to enter Tom during his fever, causing him to curse Ginny and her religion and later, when the knocking mysteriously stops, to go into fits of seizures. Even though Ginny can justify each of these occurrences with a reasonable explanation, these scenes heighten the central themes of spirituality and control in the novel. For Ginny, spirituality is not just something one experiences in the church, but something that is present in everyday life. Good and evil spirits are a reality to Ginny, which is why she feels she must fight to protect herself and her family through worship.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is first person, limited omniscience told through Ginny Peace's voice. This point of view is extremely important to the novel since the entire plot focuses around Ginny's personal relationship with her faith and the conflict that arises when her faith is challenged by her relationship with her husband. Perhaps the most important theme of the novel is Ginny's emotional growth - both personally and religiously, and the dramatic impact of this growth might be lost if the reader was not privy to her thoughts and emotions, first hand.

Even though the story is told through Ginny's thoughts, the text is evenly split between dialogue and Ginny's personal reaction what is happening around her. The only exception to this set up is in chapter fifteen, which is written entirely as a letter from Ginny to her brother, Locke. Even though the reader only experiences the world of the novel through Ginny's eyes, the reader is still able to experience complete, rounded characters, especially Tom, and is able to see the complexities of Tom's character even though Ginny is only able to see his flaws.

Setting

The majority of the novel is set on the Peace farm in Asheville. Although the state in which Asheville is located is never explicitly mentioned, description leads the reader to believe it is the Asheville located in North Carolina. The farm is located on hundreds of acres of land - woods, swamps, fields, streams, and valleys. Ginny's favorite part of the land is Sunset Rock, the place she so named as a child, on the west side of the property overlooking where the sun sets. This is the place where she and Tom decided to get engaged, and also the place she tried to reach while pregnant for the third time when she was attacked by the rabid dog. The rest of the land is not described in detail until much later in the novel, when Pa, Tom, and Ginny walk the entire length of their property replacing the boundary stakes. There, Ginny realizes there are parts of her property she has never even seen before. The land is full of generations of memories and that is something worth fighting for when it is threatened. Even without a map or compass, Pa knows his way around the land, and knows exactly where each stake should be place, even the parts of the land Ginny has never seen before. As the walk, Pa tells Tom and Ginny all the memories he has of the land, making it clear how heartbroken he would be if the land were to be lost. It becomes clear to Ginny that this land is also where Tom feels most at home. It is a spiritual place for him, where he feels useful and at one with the world. The land is like Tom's church, and Ginny realizes that it must be fought for with the save vigor with which she fights for her own spirituality.

There are other settings in the novel, but they are much less significant. The first of these are the brush arbors, small tiki hut like tents that are built in the woods for



Pentecostal worship services. The services are typically held in these types of buildings because they are of the earth - with thatched roofs and sawdust floors. There is also a scene in which Ginny goes to town to speak with the lawyer about her land when the Johnsons are threatening her. Ginny describes the town a dizzyingly busy with people, and after an afternoon there, she is anxious to get back to the calm of her farm.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written from Ginny's point of view, through her own thoughts and language. Because Ginny is relatively uneducated, the language is simple and reads as if she is speaking to the reader directly. Her sentences are structured the way she would speak, so there are many grammar and syntax errors. Even so, the sentences flow easily and should not trip readers up. The effect of this sentence structure adds a sense of authority in the character's voice. The voice is genuine, believable, and transportive - in listening to Ginny's story through her own voice and language, the reader is genuinely transported to another time and place. There is no question that Ginny is a hard farm worker from the turn of the twentieth century, which is especially profound because her sympathetic female character was complexly written by a male author. Mixed in with Ginny's rural language are bits of religious and academic language, both of which help to characterize Ginny as a narrator. The two things most important to Ginny, aside from her family, are her religion and her books, so it only makes sense that these items would factor into her narrative voice.

Structure

The novel is comprised of nineteen chapters of relatively equal length - between fifteen to twenty pages. The shortest chapter of the novel is chapter fifteen, which is written as a letter from Ginny to Locke, the only chapter to break traditional narrative and dialogue form, which spans eleven printed pages. The longest chapter is chapter eighteen, which spans thirty-one pages, and covers Ginny's emotional climax in the novel as she cares for Tom during his illness - which leads to her struggles with religion, family, and self discovery. Each of the chapters is written in accessible language that quickly moves the plot along. Action is always the focus of each chapter and the reader is rarely lost in long descriptions as the sense of urgency continually progresses the plot.

The plot of the novel is relatively straightforward as Ginny struggles to balance her religion and her marriage. She and Tom fight about control almost from the time they are married, and that argument continues through the rest of the novel, although it manifests itself in different ways, always amping up the tension and pressure on the characters until they finally crack. The only subplots that appear in the novel are Ginny's suspicion that Tom is having an affair with Florrie and the property conflict with the Johnson family, but neither of these subplots has any real impact on the major conflict in the novel: Ginny's spirituality and Tom's greed.



Quotes

"You've got to fight fire with fire. Just like you caseharden a nail to make it stronger, or fire a pot in the fiery furnace to make it last. It takes the second baptism to see you through."

p. 6

"I have never worked before or since as on that ship. I was more than myself, and better than myself. It seemed I became the work and was no longer me at all."

p. 42

"He wanted to work and do. I could see it was a pain for him to talk to strangers, and to tell about himself. He was comfortable with his broad hands and shoulders. I felt if I could touch him, I would feel calm too, and things might work out in the future."

p. 45

"Sometimes I think we only recollect what we have remembered before. What we recall is having recalled something already, so our strongest and truest memories come from a chain of often recalled things, and in that chain, over the years, events get adjusted and sorted around and stretched to fit the way we see things along the way."

p. 69

"People will locate themselves around a fire, and feel confident and comforted. That's why alters in the Bible always had fires. That's why the hearth is the center of the household. Building a fire was Tom's way of establishing himself in our house. It was his fire."

p. 77

"I felt almost lightheaded reading those words they was so powerful. It was the promise of prophesying, and signs and wonders, that stirred me most. I could hardly read them without tears coming. That promise was the richest thing we had."

p. 95

"Anger is among the sweetest feelings people know. That's why they cherish it and feed it and remember it so long. Anger is like a tightening and sharpening of sight. It is the brightest angle from which to look at things."

p. 119

"We was in no hurry because we knowed something would be give to us. I thought about the beans we had picked that day, and how beans get hard when they are ready to pick. You could pick beans just by the feel of them. With your fingers you could tell the pulses in a bean, and then count the beans into a basket."

pp. 176-77

"Almost everything we do is for reassurance. I guess what Mama feared most and Tom fears most is loss of control and reason. It scares them to see a husband or wife go out



of control. If somebody that close to them can lose their willpower and dignity then they might also."

p. 305

"But it felt like the fever saw my will pushing against it. I had to be patient and outsmart it. The sickness was evil that had got in Tom's flesh. It could see me but I couldn't see it."

p. 310

"It was such a waste that we had fought all those years. But saddest of all was that I could never repay him, or thank him, or tell him that I loved him. I wanted to tell him we was in his debt, not him in ours. I wanted to say I accepted his gifts."

p. 334



Topics for Discussion

Discuss Ginny's relationship with the Pentecostal services. What was Ginny's first experience with Spirit possession like? What was her reaction? How did Ginny's relationship with the Pentecostal church change as she aged? What did Ginny receive from these services that she did not receive in her marriage?

Describe the marriage of Tom and Ginny. First, describe how the couple met and what their initial first impressions were. Then, explain what each of the two gained from marrying the other. What did they lose in their marriage? What do you think held the couple together during their times of turmoil? If Tom had not died, do you think his marriage could have been saved? Why or why not?

Discuss Tom's fear of the Pentecostal services. Where do you think Tom's fears come from? Do you think Tom was truly trying to control his wife and her spirituality, or was something deeper driving him to forbid her from attending the services? What was Tom's reaction to the first Pentecostal service he attended with Ginny? Given his history, do you think his reaction was justified? Why or why not?

Discuss Ginny's accusation of Tom's greed. Why does Ginny believe that Tom is "blinded by greed"? What danger does Ginny believe will come from Tom's greed? What examples occur in the text that support Ginny's accusation of Tom's greed? What examples occur in the text that dispel Ginny's accusation? Then, describe how Ginny's view of Tom's greed changes after Tom dies. What change occurs in Ginny's character to alter the way she feels about her husband?

Describe the representation of Native Americans in the text. How are they described? Do you think this description is accurate to the way Caucasian Americans felt about Native Americans at the time? Why or why not? Give at least two examples of interactions Ginny, or another character, has with Native Americans in the novel. What is the outcome of these interactions?

Discuss the representation of medicine in the novel through the eyes of the three medical "professionals": Dr. Johns, Dr. Match, and Locke Peace. What is each of these men's approach to medicine and healing? What is the same about their medicinal approaches? What is different? Which of their methods seems to be the most effective? How can you tell? How do each of these approaches relate to spirituality and education?

Describe Ginny's relationship with her sister, Florrie. First, describe each of the characters individually - what is the same about these sisters? What is different? Then, describe how jealousy fuels the relationship between these sisters. What does Ginny have that Florrie is jealous of? What does Florrie have that Ginny is jealous of? In the end, what is the outcome of the jealousy between these sisters? How is their relationship affected?



Describe the introduction of supernatural presences in the text. Choose at least three examples of times when there appears to be a supernatural presence in the scene and describe them, in detail, here. What is the intent of these spirits? What is their affect on the plot of the novel? What is Ginny's reaction to the supernatural presences in her life? How do these presences affect Ginny's relationship to death, life, and religion?

Describe the threats that occurred in the novel to the Peace-Powell land. First, describe the threat to the land that comes from the neighbors. How is this threat dealt with? Then, describe the threat to the land from the fire. How is this threat contained? Then, describe how, through the threats, Ginny comes to realize what the land means to herself, her father, and her husband. How do these threats affect Ginny's relationship with her family and her understanding of self?

Discuss the use of letters in the novel. Why does Ginny feel that writing letters clarifies her thoughts in a way that speaking cannot? Who is Ginny's audience in the letters? What effect does Ginny's letter have on her marriage? Then, describe the letter Ginny receives in return. What light does this letter shed on Ginny's relationship with her husband? How does the advice in the letter affect the way Ginny views Tom? How does the letter lead Ginny to discover her "truest pleasure"?