

# **as we are now by may sarton**

## **Ebook Description: As We Are Now by May Sarton: A Critical Exploration**

This ebook offers a comprehensive critical analysis of May Sarton's powerful and poignant novel, "As We Are Now." It delves beyond a simple plot summary to explore the novel's complex themes of aging, loss, mental illness, societal neglect, and the enduring power of human connection in the face of adversity. The analysis considers Sarton's masterful use of narrative structure, character development, and symbolic language to depict the psychological and emotional turmoil experienced by the protagonist and other characters. The ebook's significance lies in its illumination of a frequently overlooked yet critically important aspect of Sarton's oeuvre – her unflinching portrayal of mental fragility and the societal structures that either exacerbate or fail to address it. Its relevance extends to contemporary readers grappling with similar themes of aging, mental health challenges, and the search for meaning and connection in an increasingly isolating world. By offering a nuanced critical perspective, the ebook provides valuable insights into both Sarton's writing and the enduring human experiences she so effectively captures.

## **Ebook Title: Unraveling "As We Are Now": A Critical Journey Through May Sarton's Masterpiece**

### **Outline:**

Introduction: Introducing May Sarton and "As We Are Now," its historical context, and the critical approaches employed in this analysis.

Chapter 1: The Crumbling Facade of Grace Ansell: Exploring the protagonist's descent into mental illness, analyzing her character arc and the contributing factors to her decline.

Chapter 2: Relationships and Isolation: A Web of Connection and Neglect: Examining the various relationships within the novel – familial, romantic, and social – and their impact on Grace and other characters.

Chapter 3: Symbolism and Setting: Mirrors of the Inner World: Deconstructing the symbolic significance of recurring motifs, imagery, and the setting itself in reflecting the characters' psychological states.

Chapter 4: The Weight of the Past: Trauma and its Legacy: Investigating the influence of past traumas and experiences on Grace's present struggles and the shaping of her identity.

Chapter 5: Societal Attitudes Towards Mental Illness: Analyzing the novel's critique of societal attitudes towards mental illness and the inadequacy of

available support systems.

Chapter 6: Themes of Aging, Loss, and Mortality: Exploring how these themes intertwine throughout the novel and their contribution to the overall narrative arc.

Conclusion: Summarizing key findings, reflecting on the enduring relevance of Sarton's work, and proposing avenues for future critical engagement.

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## **Introduction: Stepping into May Sarton's World**

May Sarton's "As We Are Now" (1973) is not a novel for the faint of heart. This powerful work of literary fiction plunges readers into the turbulent inner world of Grace Ansell, an aging woman grappling with a debilitating mental illness. Often overlooked compared to some of Sarton's other works, "As We Are Now" offers a potent exploration of mental fragility, societal neglect, and the enduring resilience of the human spirit. This analysis delves into the novel's multifaceted layers, examining its character development, symbolism, thematic concerns, and critical significance. The work's historical context—a time when mental health awareness was nascent—further underscores its relevance to contemporary readers facing similar challenges.

## **Chapter 1: The Crumbling Facade of Grace Ansell: A Descent into Madness**

Grace Ansell, the novel's central figure, is not simply a character; she is a complex psychological study. Her descent into mental illness is depicted with both compassion and brutal honesty. Sarton masterfully avoids sensationalism, instead presenting a gradual unraveling, marked by increasing paranoia, confusion, and a detachment from reality. Grace's initial struggles are subtle, masked by a façade of polite society. But as the narrative progresses, her internal turmoil manifests outwardly, impacting her relationships and her ability to function. This nuanced portrayal challenges readers to confront the stigma surrounding mental illness and to understand the complexities of its manifestation. The gradual deterioration is key to understanding the emotional impact of the narrative; it's not a sudden break, but a slow crumbling of the self. Analyzing Grace's behavior, her interactions with others, and her internal monologues allows us to understand the progression of her illness and the psychological impact it has.

## **Chapter 2: Relationships and Isolation: A Web of Connection and Neglect**

The relationships within "As We Are Now" are pivotal in both triggering and exacerbating Grace's decline. Her strained relationship with her family, particularly her indifferent and preoccupied daughter, contributes significantly to her sense of isolation. The novel also reveals the

limitations and failures of the formal support systems available to Grace. This lack of adequate care highlights the societal neglect experienced by individuals struggling with mental illness, a theme that sadly remains relevant today. The analysis of these relationships highlights the importance of human connection and how the absence or inadequacy of these connections can severely affect an individual's well-being, particularly when facing mental health challenges.

### Chapter 3: Symbolism and Setting: Mirrors of the Inner World

Sarton masterfully employs symbolism throughout the novel, using imagery and the setting itself to reflect Grace's internal state. The decaying mansion, with its crumbling structure and encroaching nature, becomes a metaphor for Grace's own crumbling mental landscape. Recurring motifs like mirrors, reflecting both Grace's deteriorating condition and the distorted perceptions of others, further enhance the novel's symbolic power. The analysis of these symbolic elements offers deeper insights into the underlying themes and enriches the reader's understanding of the text. The setting itself plays a crucial role, acting as a character in the narrative, reflecting the emotional climate.

### Chapter 4: The Weight of the Past: Trauma and its Legacy

Grace's past experiences significantly contribute to her current struggles. Unresolved traumas and emotional wounds subtly surface throughout the narrative, influencing her perceptions and behavior. Exploring this element reveals the lasting impact of trauma on mental health and emphasizes the importance of addressing past experiences to promote healing and well-being. The novel subtly hints at past traumas and losses that have left lasting scars on Grace's psyche, shaping her present-day experience.

### Chapter 5: Societal Attitudes Towards Mental Illness: A Harsh Critique

"As We Are Now" serves as a poignant critique of societal attitudes towards mental illness. The novel exposes the indifference, misunderstanding, and even cruelty faced by individuals struggling with mental health issues. Sarton highlights the inadequate resources and the societal stigma that often isolate and further marginalize those who need support. This critique remains incredibly relevant in our contemporary context, where, despite progress in mental health awareness, stigma and inadequate access to care continue to pose significant challenges.

### Chapter 6: Themes of Aging, Loss, and Mortality:

Beyond mental illness, "As We Are Now" explores universal themes of aging, loss, and mortality. Grace's descent is intertwined with the acceptance of her own aging body and the loss of her vitality. The novel contemplates the inevitability of death and the need to find meaning and purpose in the face of mortality. These overarching themes resonate deeply with readers of all

ages, adding another layer of emotional complexity to the narrative.

## Conclusion: The Enduring Relevance of "As We Are Now"

"As We Are Now" remains a powerful and unsettling read. It is a testament to Sarton's ability to portray complex characters and difficult themes with sensitivity and unflinching honesty. The novel's exploration of mental illness, societal neglect, and the human capacity for both resilience and despair remains strikingly relevant in our own time. This analysis has sought to illuminate the depth and complexity of Sarton's work, highlighting its literary merit and its continued significance in contemporary discussions of mental health and human experience. It provides a critical lens through which to examine the novel's nuanced portrayal of suffering, resilience, and the complexities of the human condition.

## FAQs:

1. What is the main theme of "As We Are Now"? The central theme revolves around the experience of mental illness, exploring its impact on the individual and their relationships within a society that often fails to adequately address mental health needs.
1. Who is the protagonist of the novel? Grace Ansell is the central character, whose descent into mental illness drives the narrative.
1. What is the significance of the setting in the novel? The decaying mansion acts as a powerful symbol of Grace's deteriorating mental state.
1. How does Sarton portray mental illness? Sarton presents mental illness with both compassion and realism, avoiding sensationalism and focusing on the gradual decline of the protagonist.
1. What is the novel's critique of society? The novel criticizes society's inadequate support systems and the pervasive stigma surrounding mental illness.

1. What other themes are explored in "As We Are Now"? Themes of aging, loss, mortality, and the power of human connection are interwoven throughout the narrative.
1. Is "As We Are Now" a difficult read? Yes, due to the novel's exploration of challenging themes, including mental illness and decline, it can be emotionally demanding for some readers.
1. Why is this ebook important? The ebook provides a comprehensive critical analysis, offering valuable insights into Sarton's work and its ongoing relevance in discussions about mental health and aging.
1. Who would benefit from reading this ebook? Students, scholars, and general readers interested in May Sarton, literary analysis, mental health, and the complexities of human experience will find this ebook valuable.

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