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# A Critical Study of Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights

Anjali Sharma, Dr. Kumkum Ray

B.A.(H) English Semester 6 Batch 2021 – 2024 Amity School of Languages Lucknow Campus, UP, India

Head of Department Amity School of Languages Lucknow Campus, UP, India

**ABSTRACT:** Set against the backdrop of Yorkshire's windswept moors, Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights" is a tragic tale of love, retribution, and redemption. Nelly Dean, a servant who is well-versed in the families of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, and Mr. Lockwood, a recent arrival, tell the story in interlocking narratives. It is around the intense and turbulent love between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw, which is impeded by betrayal, jealousy, and societal norms. Much of the plot is driven by Heathcliff's compulsive desire for vengeance against those who have wronged him, which creates a circle of cruelty and suffering that lasts for generations. "Wuthering Heights" delves into topics such as the devastating power of love, the consequences of unbridled desire, and the potential of redemption even in the midst of darkness, all of which are shown through its realistic characters, evocative setting, and rich writing. It continues to be a timeless masterpiece of English literature, enthraling readers with its unadulterated passion and eerie beauty.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Emily Brontë begins "Wuthering Heights" with a frame story in which Mr. Lockwood, a newcomer to the Yorkshire moors, rents Thrushcross Grange from an enigmatic landlord known only as Heathcliff. In search of peace, Lockwood visits Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff's neighbouring home, where he meets the grumpy Heathcliff and his mysterious family. Lockwood asks questions concerning the residents of Wuthering Heights, especially the ghostly presence he experiences there, because he is curious about his landlord's past.

The plot then shifts to a sequence of flashbacks told by Thrushcross Grange's servant, Nelly Dean, who describes the turbulent past of the Earnshaw and Linton families over several generations. The intense and destructive love that Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, the orphan the Earnshaws adopted, share is the central theme of this story. The book explores themes of love, retaliation, envy, and socioeconomic status as it digs into the complexity of interpersonal relationships. The story's volatile emotions and sinister secrets are appropriately reflected in the vast and barren Yorkshire moors.

The characters in "Wuthering Heights" are well-drawn, with unique qualities and shortcomings. One of the most fascinating and mysterious antiheroes in literature is Heathcliff, with his resentful and brooding intensity. With her ferocious energy and torn allegiances, Catherine Earnshaw personifies the intense but deadly essence of love. The novel has become recognised as a classic of English literature because of its examination of the cyclical nature of retribution and the deadly force of unbridled desire. "Wuthering Heights" enthralls readers with its investigation of the human psyche and its timeless themes of love and redemption amid the desolation of the Yorkshire moors thanks to its profoundly atmospheric prose and nuanced characterizations. **About the Author: Emily Brontë**

English author and poet Emily Jane Brontë is best known for her sole and enduring book, Wuthering Heights, who is today considered a classic of the language. Of the three Brontë sisters who endured Emily was the second oldest; she was older than Anne and younger than Charlotte. She worked under the pseudonym Ellis Bell, which is masculine. Patrick Brontë and Maria Branwell welcomed Emily into the world at Thornton, a village close to Bradford, Yorkshire. She was the fifth child in a family of six and Charlotte Brontë's younger sister. In 1824 the family moved to Haworth, where Emily's father was appointed permanent curate. It was in this novel setting that their peculiar artistic endeavors began to flourish. The three sisters and their brother Patrick Branwell Brontë imagined fictitious worlds (Angria, Gondal, Gaaldine, and Oceania) as children, which they used as the setting for novels they wrote. This was after their mother passed away. With the exception of character-spoken poems, not much of Emily's writing from this era has survived (The Brontës' Web of Childhood, Fannie Ratchford, 1941).

Emily started working at Law Hill School, close to Halifax, as a governess at Miss Pargett's Ladies Academy in 1842. She left after around six months because she was homesick. Afterwards, she went to a private school in Brussels with her sister Charlotte. Later, they attempted to start a school in their house, but it was empty.



After realizing Charlotte was a gifted poet, Emily collaborated with her sisters Charlotte and Anne to produce a collection of poems called Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell in 1846. The Brontë sisters took on androgynous first names in order to avoid the discrimination that exists today against women writers. The initial letter of their given names was retained by all three: Charlotte became Currer Bell, Anne Acton Bell, and Emily Ellis Bell. His sole book, *Wuthering Heights*, was released in 1847 as the second of three installments (his sister, Anne Agnes Gray, wrote the third and final section). Its innovative structure confounded critics. Although the book received mixed reviews upon publication, it later became a classic of English literature. *Wuthering Heights* was independently published in 1850 under Charlotte's real name, Emily, after she had edited and published the book.

Emily's health suffered from the unforgiving environment at home and at school, just like that of her sisters. After getting a cold at his brother's funeral in September and declining medical assistance, he died on December 19, 1848, most likely from tuberculosis, while under his brother's care. In Haworth, West Yorkshire, England, he was laid to rest in the Chapel of St. Michael and the Family of All Angels.

## II. SUMMARY

Lockwood stays at Thrushcross Grange in the English highlands at the end of the winter in 1801, where he meets Heathcliff, his harsh landlord. resides amid this untamed and stormy country, four miles from the grange, in the old manor of *Wuthering Heights*. Nelly Dean, Lockwood's housekeeper, extends an invitation to him to share the tale of Heathcliff and the peculiar residents of *Wuthering Heights*. Nelly accepts, and Lockwood writes down her account in his journal. The story starts with these journal notes.

Nelly remembers her early years spent serving Mr. Earnshaw and his family as a servant at *Wuthering Heights*. When she was a small child, she saw Mr. Earnshaw adopt an orphan boy from Liverpool and nurture him with his own kids. Hindley and Catherine, the Earnshaw children, don't like the dark-skinned Heathcliff at first. But Catherine quickly falls deeply in love with him, and the two of them spend their days playing on the moors. Mr. Earnshaw starts to favor Heathcliff over Hindley, his own son, after the loss of his wife. Mr. Earnshaw sends Hindley away to college while keeping Heathcliff close by when Hindley continues to mistreat Heathcliff.

After Mr. Earnshaw dies three years later, Hindley becomes the inheritor of *Wuthering Heights*. After returning with Frances, his wife, Hindley starts pursuing Heathcliff's retribution right away. Heathcliff, who was first an orphan and then a spoilt and preferred son, is now forced to work in the fields and is treated like an ordinary laborer. Heathcliff stays in constant contact with Catherine in spite of this. They go to Thrushcross Grange one evening with the intention of making fun of the snooty and timid children who live there, Edgar and Isabella Linton. During their visit, Catherine was bitten by a dog and has to stay at the Grange for five weeks in order to heal. Mrs. Linton puts a lot of effort into shaping Catherine into a refined young woman while she is visiting. When Catherine comes back, her relationship with Heathcliff is more complicated because she has started to feel something for Edgar.

After Frances passes away giving birth to a son named Hareton, Hindley becomes an alcoholic and becomes even more harsh and cruel toward Heathcliff. Despite her intense love for Heathcliff, Catherine agrees to marry Edgar Linton because she wants to rise in society. After leaving *Wuthering Heights* for three years, Heathcliff returns shortly after Catherine and Edgar get married.

After his return, Heathcliff sets out right once to exact revenge on those who have mistreated him. With his newfound mysterious wealth, he strategically lends money to Hindley, knowing that it will lead to his downfall due to increased debts and despair. Upon Hindley's death, Heathcliff inherits the manor. To also secure his place as heir to Thrushcross Grange, he cruelly marries Isabella Linton. Catherine becomes ill, gives birth to a daughter, and passes away. Heathcliff's ghost begs to remain on Earth, ready to put up with any kind of haunting as long as it keeps her from abandoning him. After giving birth to Heathcliff's son, whom she names Linton in honor of her family, Isabella subsequently runs away to London and raises him as her own.

Nelly Dean looks after Catherine's daughter as a nursemaid for thirteen years. Like her mother before her, young Cathy is attractive and obstinate, but her father's softer touches have the power to alter her disposition. She is raised in Thrushcross Grange without knowing the manor's past, until one day she discovers it while strolling on the moors, where she meets Hareton and they play together.

Linton arrives into the Grange to live with his father, Heathcliff, after Isabella passes away soon after. Heathcliff treats his sick and whiny kid much worse than he does the boy's mother.

Three years later, Cathy visits *Wuthering Levels* to see Linton and runs into Heathcliff in the fields. She and Linton begin a romantic correspondence that is entirely letter-driven. When Nelly destroys all of Cathy's correspondence, the girl begins to disappear at night in order to spend time with her vulnerable little darling, who asks her to come back and nurse him back to health. However, it soon becomes apparent that Linton is only pursuing Cathy because Heathcliff is





forcing him to; if Cathy marries Linton, Heathcliff believes his rightful claim on Thrushcross Grange — and his retribution against Edgar Linton — would be fulfilled.

Heathcliff brings Nelly and Cathy back to Wuthering Levels at some point when Edgar Linton grows ill and is on the verge of death. He holds them captive there until Cathy marries Linton. Not long after the marriage, Edgar dies, and the wiped-out Linton dies right after him. At the moment, Heathcliff is in charge of Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Levels. While he leases Thrushcross Grange to Lockwood, he gives Cathy the ability to live in Wuthering Levels and conduct herself as any other worker.

As Nelly reaches the present, her story comes to an end. Disappointed, Lockwood vacates Thrushcross Grange and returns to London. Either way, he visits Nelly six months later and finds out that the plot has been improved even further. Even though Cathy first made fun of Hareton for his lack of knowledge and awareness (he finished Hareton's education as a form of retribution after Hindley passed away), Cathy eventually grows to love Hareton when they are living separately at Wuthering Levels. It turns out that Heathcliff is becoming more and more obsessed with the recollections of the older Catherine, to the point that he begins communicating with her ghost. Everything he views serves to remind him of her. Heathcliff passes away shortly after spending the night walking over the fields. Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Levels are acquired by Hareton and Cathy, who plan to tie the knot on New Year's Day of the following year. After learning the story's conclusion, Lockwood visits Heathcliff and Catherine's graves.

### III. CHARACTER SKETCH OF THE PROTAGONIST

Heathcliff

The plot of *Wuthering Heights* revolves around Heathcliff's tale. His physical attributes are vividly described in the novel's first line, when Lockwood notes how his "black eyes" avert suspiciously behind his brows as Lockwood approaches. (Brontë, 1847) Nelly's story starts when he is first introduced to the Earnshaw household, his vindictive schemes form the core of the narrative, and the book concludes with his passing. For this reason, a lot of people have stuck with the book because they want to understand him and his goals.

However, Heathcliff defies understanding, and it's difficult for readers to ignore what they hope or expect from him. Throughout the book, the reader is teased with the idea that Heathcliff is not who he seems, that his wicked crimes are merely an outward manifestation of his unfulfilled love for Catherine, or that his bad deeds are a mask for a romantic hero's true nature.

We expect Heathcliff to be a guy of latent kindness because he looks like a romance novel hero. Heroes in romance stories usually begin as cold, ice, and intimidating individuals before developing into incredibly devoted and compassionate individuals. The idea that "a reformed rake makes the best husband" (Brontë was already a romantic fiction cliché a century before Emily Brontë penned *Wuthering Heights*, and romance novels still revolve around it. (Brontë, 1847)

But Heathcliff never changes, and his evilness is so intense and pervasive that it is impossible to explain, not even with the help of a desire for vengeance against Hindley, Catherine, Edgar, and other people. He amuses himself by observing how much torture Isabella can withstand before recoiling in response for more, as he himself notes, making his treatment of her wholly cruel. By performing the same thing that Heathcliff does to Isabella, critic Joyce Carol Oates claims that Emily Brontë puts to the test the reader's capacity to be shocked by Heathcliff's unbridled violence and yet, masochistically, insist on seeing him as a romantic hero.

It is notable that Heathcliff begins his life as a penniless orphan residing on Liverpool's streets. The English economy was in severe decline during the 1840s, when Brontë wrote her novel. The working conditions of manufacturing workers in industrial cities like Liverpool were so bad that the middle and upper classes were terrified of a violent rebellion.

Because of this, a large portion of society's wealthier people felt both sympathy and fear for these laborers. The grim, smoke-filled, deadly factory cities were often associated with hell and portrayed in literary religious themes. William Blake, writing around the turn of the nineteenth century, speaks of the "dark Satanic Mills" that exist in England. (Brontë, 1847) Of course, Heathcliff is frequently compared to the devil by the other characters in the novel.

Given this historical context, Heathcliff seems to embody the anxieties that the book's middle-class and upper-class readers held about the working classes. The reader can easily relate to him when he is a defenseless child under Hindley Earnshaw's influence; nevertheless, he becomes a villain when he gains power and returns to *Wuthering Heights* with wealth and the trappings of a gentleman. The ambivalence that the higher classes felt toward the lower classes is consistent with this. Even if the higher classes felt that lower-class residents would try to take advantage of their position of political, social, cultural, or economic power to get out of their terrible situations, they also felt a sense of duty to help those in need.



#### IV. THEMES

Emily Bronte's enduring masterpiece "Wuthering Heights" explores intricate issues and presents the human condition in its most unadulterated state.

##### **Love and Obsession:**

The turbulent story of love and obsession at the centre of "Wuthering Heights" A large portion of the story revolves around Heathcliff's infatuation with Catherine Earnshaw. Their deep bond goes beyond traditional ideas of romance and develops into a destructive force that devours them both. Heathcliff's preoccupation with Catherine sets him up for his eventual downfall and vindictive acts. Other characters, including Edgar and Isabella Linton, also struggle with the effects of their own compulsive cravings.

##### **Social class and conflicts:**

The strict social hierarchy and tensions that resulted from it in nineteenth-century England are depicted in the novel with great vividness. The aristocratic upbringing of the Earnshaws and the Lintons contrasts sharply with Heathcliff's humble beginnings as an orphan foundling. His low social standing gets in the way of his relationship with Catherine and strengthens his desire for vengeance on those who have harmed him. The conflict between the elegant Thrushcross Grange society and the lower-class Wuthering Heights occupants highlights the issue of social class and its ramifications even further.

##### **Nature and the supernatural:**

Throughout the book, Bronte deftly uses the location of the Yorkshire moors to convey a sense of wildness and mystery. The untamed, barren surroundings reflect the protagonists' erratic feelings and tumultuous interpersonal connections. Furthermore, the novel is given an unsettling atmosphere by mystical elements that blur the lines between the natural and supernatural realms, such as Heathcliff's spectral appearances and Catherine's ghostly presence.

##### **Isolation & estrangement:**

A great deal of "Wuthering Heights" characters deal with intense feelings of estrangement and isolation. Raised as an outcast at Wuthering Heights and suffering from neglect and abandonment, Heathcliff harbours deep-seated animosity towards those who reject him. Catherine experiences inner turmoil and loneliness as a result of being divided between her love for Heathcliff and society norms around marriage and position. The book illustrates how these alienation sentiments can result in resentment, retaliation, and eventually, terrible outcomes.

##### **Duality and Doubling:**

The theme of duality and doubling is present in "Wuthering Heights," as characters frequently take on opposing characteristics or personas. For example, Heathcliff demonstrates both cruel cruelty and gentle love, which reflects his dual personality. In a same vein, Catherine struggles to balance her need for Edgar's comforts of social approval with her wild, passionate relationship to Heathcliff. The intricacy of human nature and the interaction of conflicting forces within people are highlighted by this theme.

##### **The Destructiveness of a Love That Never Changes:**

Since that Catherine and Heathcliff's love is the source of most of the main tensions that drive the plot of the book and is stronger and more enduring than any other emotion shown in Wuthering Heights, it appears that their desire for one another is the central theme of the book. Although Nelly sharply criticises Catherine and Heathcliff and calls their desire immoral, it is clear that this passion is one of the book's most captivating and memorable elements.

##### **The Unpredictability of Social Class:**

The Earnshaws and the Lintons hold a relatively vulnerable position in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British social order as members of the gentry. The aristocracy, gentry, royalty, and lower classes—who comprised the great bulk of the population—were the rungs on the social ladder in Britain. The gentry, or upper middle class, had enormous estates and servants, but their social standing was still precarious. Because aristocrats held official titles, their social standing was a formal and resolved affair.

##### **Symbols Moors:**

The landscape is heavily emphasized in Wuthering Heights, lending the site symbolic meaning. Moors make up the majority of this terrain: they are large, untamed areas that are high yet somewhat damp and therefore unfruitful. Moorland is uncultivated and difficult to navigate due to its homogeneity. There are areas there that are quite wet, where people might drown. (Wuthering Heights makes multiple references to this idea.) Therefore, the moors are excellent representations of nature's wild menace. The moors, where Heathcliff and Catherine first play together as

children, provide as a framework for the formation of their relationship, and the moorland projects its symbolic meaning onto the romance.

### **Windows:**

Little, if anything, exists outside of the two huge estates that make up the book's miniature universe. Therefore, windows—both actual and metaphorical—serve to confine the characters while showcasing what is on the other side. Heathcliff understands that, figuratively speaking, he lives on one side of the glass and she on the other, and that, while it may be impossible for him to escape to a higher social class, it is doable for Catherine. However, Catherine is also restrained, although physically. Even though she is frantic to open the windows to feel closer to Heathcliff, in Chapter XII, locked windows represent her incapacity to be with him due of outside circumstances, such social standing, that keep them apart. As a result, windows can both provide hope for a new future and act as a mirror to highlight how imprisoned and stuck the characters truly are.

Additionally, windows act as a barrier between life and death. For instance, in the opening of the book, Lockwood witnesses Catherine's ghost attempting to enter via a window after hearing a branch tapping on it. Her ghost is attempting to re-enter the area that she is unable to occupy after passing away. The reader can also see this expressed in more concrete terms: windows are frequently used by characters to broaden their perspective on the world, either through their own observations or those of others. An instance of an appearance occurs early in Heathcliff and Catherine's childhood as they gaze out Thrushcross Grange's window, taking in the opulence of the ornate surroundings.

### **Ghosts:**

Like in most other Gothic novels, ghosts are mentioned throughout *Wuthering Heights*, but Brontë always portrays them in a way that makes it unclear whether or not they are genuine. Consequently, the setting of the narrative can always be understood as realistic. Certain ghosts, like the spirit of Catherine who appears to Lockwood in Chapter III, can be understood as dreams. You may dismiss the peasants' accounts of seeing Heathcliff's ghost in Chapter XXXIV as unverified myth. Regardless of whether the spirits are "real".

### **Genre of the Novel**

This book, *Wuthering Heights*, is Gothic. Gothic fiction sometimes includes otherworldly themes, menacing locales, and threats against young women, frequently with an isolated mansion as the setting. A growing interest in psychology and the subconscious, particularly suppressed urges, was linked to the Gothic novel's success throughout the Victorian era, which saw its development in the 18th century. The novel's author, Emily Brontë, presents *Wuthering Heights* as a quintessential Gothic structure with dark and enigmatic secrets, incorporating mystical aspects such as the potential for ghosts. Lockwood remarks on "the excessive slant of a few, stunted firs," (Brontë, 1847) for instance, when he first views the mansion. and thin spines that appear to be begging for the sun's handouts. In addition, the plot of *Cathy Linton* centres around a young lady who is being held captive by an evil, older guy. But although earlier English Gothic novels were usually set outside of England, in places like Spain or Italy, Brontë picked the English setting of the Yorkshire moors.

### **Motifs Doubles:**

In order to establish a sense of structure, Brontë pairs together characters, places, and ideas. Heathcliff and Catherine believe they are the same person and share many traits. There is conflict between the parts of Catherine that desire Edgar and the parts that desire Heathcliff. Catherine and her daughter Cathy are completely different from each other, yet they are also very similar. *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange* are two homes that represent radically different realities and ideals.

Nelly and Mr. Lockwood, the book's two distinct narrators, are distinct characters. Such paired elements typically have a quite complex relationship because the members of each pair are neither diametrically opposing nor completely alike. For example, the Earnshaws and the Lintons may appear to represent different moral perspectives at the beginning of the book, but by the conclusion, there are so many marriages between the two families that it is impossible to tell them apart.

### **Repetition:**

Repetition is another device used by Brontë to organize *Wuthering Heights*. It seems as though nothing ever ends in the world of this book. Instead, it seems as though time is made up of cycles, with the horrors of the past happening again in the present. The way character names are repeated, making the names of the younger generation seem like just recycled versions of their parents' names, forces the reader to consider how tale elements likewise recur. For instance, Heathcliff degrades Hareton in a manner similar to how Hindley degrades Heathcliff. Moreover, Cathy imitates her mother's derision of Joseph's genuine fervor for religion. Heathcliff even does the same error once more while trying to open Catherine's tomb.

### **The Conflict Between Nature and Culture:**

In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë constantly sets culture and nature against each other. The Earnshaws are emblematic of nature, particularly Catherine and Heathcliff. These are passionate characters who follow their desires rather than reflection or propriety. Consequently, *Wuthering Heights*, the home they share, becomes to represent a comparable wildness. Conversely, the Linton family and Thrushcross Grange stand for culture, elegance, tradition, and cultivation.

### **Setting of the Novel**

Yorkshire is a location in northern England where *Wuthering Heights* is set. The novel's "present day" action takes place between 1801 and 1802, with the previous thirty years' worth of plot events serving as the backdrop. Two magnificent estates belonging to nearby families dominate the tiny, desolate, and natural area where everything takes place. A tight and concentrated plot that centres on a small group of individuals is made possible by this setting choice. Lockwood is frequently astounded by what he discovers about the locals at the Heights because of their apparent disregard for many traditional social norms stemming from their remote location.

The weather, which is stormy and gloomy, also dominates the scene. According to Lockwood, "the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather" is what the word "Wuthering" refers to. (Brontë, 1847) But the Yorkshire moors can also be a violent and lovely area. When Lockwood returns to Yorkshire during a more favourable season, he muses, "In summer, nothing more divine, in winter, nothing more dreary." (Brontë, 1847) As a result, the environment also alludes to the stormy, destructive, yet supernaturally strong love of Catherine and Heathcliff.

### **Writing Style**

The writing style of *Wuthering Heights* is lyrical and beautiful. Many critics have noted that Brontë makes references to her earlier poetry in the work by employing romantic language and love imagery. Dark and passionate passages, unheard of in a Victorian novel, convey the characters' strong feelings. The structure of *Wuthering Heights* has a significant impact on its style as well. The majority of the book is Lockwood's diary, which combines his personal narratives of the events with Nelly's narrated versions of them. There are also direct quotes from other characters, such as Heathcliff and Catherine.

Because of this, Brontë's style differs depending on the persona speaking. For example, Heathcliff usually uses brief, pointed sentences to convey his rage, as "How-how dare you, under my roof? What can you mean by talking in this way to me?" "If there's to be fresh ortherings—just when I gotten to two maisters, if I munhev' a mistress set o'er my heead, it's like time to be flitting," says Joseph, in a Yorkshire dialect that befits his station as a servant. (Brontë, 1847)

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Emily Brontë's "*Wuthering Heights*" ends with a string of catastrophic incidents that, in the end, provide conclusion to the turbulent story of passion, retaliation and redemption.

The characters, especially Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw, change dramatically in the last chapters. Heathcliff's infatuation with Catherine drives him to take advantage of and treat people badly, but ultimately, his resentment and thirst for vengeance overtake him. Heathcliff's death, which finally reunites him with Catherine in death, signifies the end of his suffering and acts as a sort of atonement. After years of internal strife, Catherine, on the other hand, finds serenity in death. Her eerie presence persists throughout the story, signifying the destructive nature of obsession and the eternal power of love. In the end, Catherine's soul finds comfort in the hereafter despite the anguish and suffering brought on by their decisions.

As they work to escape the cycle of violence and hatred that afflicted their forebears, the younger generation—represented by Cathy and Hareton—offers hope for the future. Their tale of love is similar to that of Catherine and Heathcliff, but it ends on a happier and healthier note.

Love, retaliation, and the passing of time are themes that are emphasised in "*Wuthering Heights*"'s climax. It draws attention to the disastrous results of unbridled emotion as well as the prospect of salvation via compassion and forgiveness. There is a sense of catharsis as the characters achieve closure and resolution in death, despite the disasters that befall them.

In summary, "*Wuthering Heights*" ends with a moving and thought-provoking meditation on the intricacies of human nature and the perseverance of love and forgiveness in the face of hardship. It leaves readers feeling both depressed and hopeful about the prospect of healing and rebirth.

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