

Interpreting the Multiple Narrative Perspectives in *Three of Us* from the Stream of Consciousness

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Abstract: *Three of Us* is Yang Jiang's review of the happy life about her two family members and herself in the past, so as to express her love to them. The narration of the book is plain and simple, the tone is moderate, and the narrative angle is diverse. The author mainly promotes the development of narrative plot through her free association and the transformation of dream, so as to make the narrative structure more compact. The adoption of the stream of consciousness technique contributes to the transformation of multiple narrative perspectives, and the two complement each other. The successful transformation of the narrative perspective also shows the effect of the stream of consciousness technique in the article.

Keywords: *Three of Us*; Narrative Perspectives; Stream of Consciousness; Free Association; Space-time Jump.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Creation of *Three of Us*

Yang Jiang's literary creations are mainly including prose, as well as novels and dramas. Having translated the foreign literary classic, *Don Quixote*, the first contemporary Chinese translation from the original Spanish language, Yang was awarded the Cross Medal of the Wisdom King Alfonso X by the King of Spain for her contribution to the spread of Spanish culture. Since its publication, *Three of Us* has been one of the classics of Chinese literature in the 20th century, and has been translated into English, German, Japanese and other languages. The full text about *Three of Us* is 90,000 words. It is a long collection of memoirs and essays written by Yang Jiang at the age of 92, which mainly describes the lives of a family of their three. In 2003, *Three of Us* won the "Open Book Award" in Taiwan. Yang Jiang is mainly divided the book into three parts to describe the life of a three-remember family for more than 60 years: the first part is "we are both old", which accounts for the shortest space in the book; The second part, "We're separated", using a unique narrative technique, expresses implicitness and is written in diversified narrative perspectives. Through using the stream of consciousness and narrating in plain and simple language, the author bid farewell in a dream to her daughter and husband who had died of serious illness; The third part, "I miss the three of us alone", is Yang Jiang's memory record of the past life about their three[1].

1.2. The Research Significance of *Three of Us*

Since the publication of *Three of Us*, the unique narrative and writing structure of the book has been the focus of research by scholars in China. From the point of view of the dream in the book, (Huo,2004) analyzed the important images such as willows in the whole work, and discussed the tension and explosiveness of the author's emotional restraint on the death of her loved ones. (Yang,2007) analyzed the creative techniques of alleging emotions in scenery, and focused on the plain and real writing tone of the prose. (Xu,2009) analyzed the narrative techniques adopted in the prose, such as the combination of virtual and reality, suspense settings, background penetration, and detailed description, to make the

whole work more contagious. (Fang,2012) dug deep into the historical development background of narrative space, and discussed the author's ingenious use of narrative space transformation in prose to promote the story development and narrative process of the work. (Xie,2020) studied the writing technique of virtual and real coexistence in prose, showing that Yang Jiang thinks her life is like a dream, and she treats her family members with the most genuine attitude. (Zhao,2021) studied the adoption of dream technique in prose, which greatly increased the charm and connotation of the article, and opened the omniscient narrative perspective. (Xu et al.2021) analyzed the inclined narrative structure of their works from the narrative perspective of the essay, and excavated the new nature of the text impression. (Bi, 2021) analyzed the writing technique of the dream space transformation and the combination of virtuality and reality in prose, highlighting the literary charm of the whole work, and focusing on the narrative mode and inclined chapter layout of *Three of Us* to achieve a delicate balance in the whole narrative process.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theory of Stream of Consciousness

The second golden period of consciousness research began in the 1980s and 1990s. William James was the pioneer of the first golden period of consciousness research[2]. William James mentioned in his "Principles of Psychology" that "The stream of our thought is like a river. On the whole easy simple flowing predominates... But at intervals an obstruction, a set-back, a log-jam occurs, stops the current, creates an eddy, and makes things move the other way[3].

2.2. Previous study on Stream of Consciousness

The concept of "stream of consciousness" first appeared in the field of psychological research when William James initially studied consciousness as being infused by neural activity that could be detected by careful introspection[4]. William James pays more attention to the study of the features of consciousness itself, for him to understand the brain is only a means to achieve this goal.

2.2.1. The Current Research on Stream of Consciousness at Abroad

William James's Stream of Consciousness Theory, Freudian Theory of Psychoanalysis and Bergson's Psychological Time Theory lay a solid foundation for the formation and development of Stream-of-Consciousness novels. The concept of "stream of consciousness" was originally controversial, and "stream of consciousness" as a term is inherently problematic. Sinclair wrote earlier in her book *Defence of Idealism* that "the unity of consciousness must not be explained or explained by the simple theory of the flow of consciousness" (1917, P80). Essays by authors such as Sinclair and Richardson have argued that "stream of consciousness" is simply a modernist concept, and that modernist experimentation with a variety of techniques has been widely recognized by scholars as encompassing "stream of consciousness" ranging from elliptical syntax to unpunctuated prose[5].

2.2.2. The Current Research on Stream of Consciousness at Home

Yuan Kejia is one of the leading figures in the creation and theoretical research of stream-of-consciousness literature in China. In 1979, he published *Symbolic Poetry, Consciousness Flow Novel, absurd Drama-Review of European and American Modernist Literature* in the first issue of *Research on Literature and Art*, and discussed his unique views on stream-of-consciousness literature creation, and constantly carried out his research on stream-of-consciousness literature creation and theory. In 1981, he founded the first domestic album of Foreign Stream of Consciousness—*Selected Works of Foreign Modernists, Volume 2* (Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, 1981). Yuan Kejia has played a significant role in promoting and developing the creation and theoretical research on stream-of-consciousness literature in China. At the same time, another person who played an important role in promoting the creation and theoretical research of stream-of-consciousness literature was Chen Kun. She believed that stream of consciousness was essential in expressing the characters' mental activities and reproducing life. The complex level of stream of consciousness was manifested in the development of characters' mental activities and events. Through many layers of interweaving, the stream of consciousness forms a new way to reproduce life, which is the product of the qualitative evolution of some fundamental literary concepts. She wrote *Research on Western Modernist Literature* (Peking University Literature Press, 1981 edition), which is the first work on western modernist literature in China. (Gao, 1981) wrote and published *Preliminary Exploration of Modern Fiction Techniques* (Huacheng Publishing House, 1981). In this chapter, he discussed his unique insights into the theory of stream of consciousness, which he believed was a new form of artistic expression, a new narrative language in modern literature. The concept of oriental stream of consciousness literature first appeared in *Oriental Stream of Consciousness Literature* (Liaoning University Press, 1987 Edition). This book defines Lu Xun as the father of oriental stream-of-consciousness novels, and analyzes the creative characteristics and techniques of Lu Xun's stream of consciousness novels in detail. *Ten Years of Literary Mainstream* (Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, 1988 Edition), edited by Song Yaoliang, discusses in detail the easternization of stream-of-consciousness literature, and Song preliminarily analyzes the influence of consciousness flow literature on contemporary literature. The

research done by these leading figures in the field of early stream of consciousness research in China provides examples and theoretical support for other scholars in China to carry out the research on stream-of-consciousness literature creation and theory.

Recent domestic studies on stream-of-consciousness literature creation stream of consciousness theory, such as the research of (Li, 2014), he made an in-depth study on William James's stream of consciousness theory, summarized that William James is a pioneer in the field of stream of consciousness, and discussed that William James's consciousness research has dual significance.(Yang et al. 2007) pointed out that the theory of stream of consciousness lays a theoretical foundation for the formation and development of stream-of-consciousness novels in the research on the theoretical basis and characteristics of western stream-of-consciousness novels. When (Xiong, 2005) and others studied the influence of western stream of consciousness literature on modern and contemporary literature, he summed up that after the stream-of-consciousness novels were introduced into China, they began to combine with Chinese local culture, and had a wide and far-reaching impact on Chinese literary creation.(Wang, 2011) discusses the expression technique and the significance of literature history of the "oriental stream of consciousness" novel. He points out that the stream of consciousness techniques used in the creation of stream-of-consciousness novels in Chinese literary circles after the "Cultural Revolution", such as inner monologues and free association, have a good driving effect on the creation of stream of consciousness literature in the same period and in the later period.(Zhou, 2016) studies the research types and development stages of stream-of-consciousness novels in the new period, summarizes and combs the research problems of stream-of-consciousness novels in the new period, and preliminarily summarizes the practical problems faced by stream-of-consciousness novels.(Guo, 2018) in the study of stream of consciousness and the modernization of Chinese novels, stresses that stream of consciousness in the world literature, as well as the emphasis of stream of consciousness on human "self" consciousness and the abstraction embodied in narrative patterns are the vanguard of modernism. In his view, the origin of the domestic stream of consciousness can be traced back to the beginning of the late Ming Dynasty and continues to develop and improve on modern times. The introduction, development and evolution of the stream of consciousness is a new transformation of the narrative mode of Chinese literature. And sincere, rich and three-dimensional images of modern people in the stream-of-consciousness literature in the history of Chinese literature is a symbol of the modernization of Chinese novels.

3. Multiple Narratives and Characters' Consciousness Presentation

3.1. Consciousness Flows and Narrative Perspective Conversion

Since the publication of *Three of Us*, the second part of the book is a popular research object for scholars to study. Yang Jiang used a long dream to promote the development of the whole book through the transformation of multiple narrative perspectives. With the continuous switching of the dream perspective and the continuous transformation of the narrative angle, in the dream Yang Jiang bid farewell to her daughter

and husband who had died of serious illness.

3.1.1. Death in Dreams

Freud believes that dreams are the artistic reproduction of the suppressed desires and emotions of humans in their subconscious. They are the vent scenes of humans[6]. Yang Jiang's first dream was to take a walk with Zhongshu. When they were talking and laughing, Zhongshu suddenly disappeared. Yang Jiang was left alone facing a wilderness in her dream, and she didn't know where to go. When she was looking for a way back, she suddenly saw an old man pulling an empty rickshaw, and she couldn't tell where to go. The dream came to an abrupt end, and Yang Jiang woke up to find that Zhongshu was sleeping next to her. Through implicit expressions, Yang Jiang hinted at the beginning of the work that her husband would die before her. Facing her husband's death, Yang Jiang was grieved but not sad, and expressed her misery with restraint, which made people cry more than the sadness and sorrow that suddenly broke out.

"I fell asleep and became a dream, which was very nimble. "My dreams are no longer lightweight; my dreams are weary and my dreams are heavy. "My dream has become very heavy, but Yuanyuan comes back from an official business, and I still follow her every night. " "I became a heavy dream. " "My dreams are very weary. It is strange that dreams of fatigue also affect my body. " "I know dreams are imaginative. If you miss it too much, you have a nightmare. "Dream is the opposite, dream is the opposite. " [7] Dreams after dreams, and the depth of the dream continues to be more profound. Yang Jiang's dream at the beginning was very light, and at the end it turned into a nightmare. Yang Jiang's dreams have become increasingly heavy as her husband and daughter's physical condition slowly worsens. When Qian Yuan's physical condition deteriorated to the late stage, watching her daughter's suffering, Yang Jiang used a nightmare to downplay her sadness in facing all this. When her daughter died, Yang Jiang hoped that the dream was reversed. Yang Jiang walked alone, returning to and from Sanlihe's apartment, her daughter's ward, and her husband's ward. She had become physically and mentally exhausted but still remained strong and never complained. With the death of her daughter and husband, the happy life of the three once disappeared, and now only Yang Jiang is left. Recalling every bit of the past in the dream, we have realized the sad and desolate state of mind of an old woman who is physically and mentally exhausted and helpless.

3.1.2. Life in Reality

"I miss the three of us alone", once their three lived together in Sanlihe's Apartment, warm and loving. They have no dispute with each other, and they are doing their favorite academic work. After the death of her daughter and husband, only Yang Jiang was left in the Sanlihe's apartment. She looked around and lamented that life was like a dream. She recalled the real past of "three of us" alone. Yang Jiang and Qian Zhongshu fell in love with each other at first sight in front of the Ancient Moon Hall in Tsinghua Garden. After that, they accompanied each other for sixty-six years. After they got married, they went to Oxford to study together. *Three of Us* keeps a detailed record of their past studies in England and France. When he first arrived in Oxford, Qian Zhongshu kissed Oxford's land, and large half of his front teeth were knocked out. If it were not for Yang Jiang's personal records, it would be difficult for readers to believe that a talented master in literature is so honest and simple in life. When Qian and Yang were studying abroad, a rich man, H. K. Spalding,

persuaded Qian to give up his Chinese scholarship and switch to philosophy to serve their research. Qian did not hesitate to refuse. In 1948, during the war of liberation in China, many celebrities and scholars fled abroad to take refuge. Qian and Yang had a way to go abroad, but they would rather share the troubles with the motherland than go abroad to be second-class citizens. Their unique intellectual integrity, distinctive patriotism, and determination to be with their motherland have infected and influenced countless readers. After the birth of childbirth suffered by Yang Jiang, so he could not bear to have a second child and did not want to distract his love for Qian Yuan. The subtleties show Qian Zhongshu's love for Yang Jiang. They were deeply in love with each other and created a story about talents and beauties in the literary world at that time. The couple praised Qian Yuan as the greatest masterpiece of their lives, and Qian Yuan lived up to her parents' high hopes to become a leader in education.

"The good things in the world are not strong, and the colored clouds are easy to scatter the glaze. The three had a warm time together. When they were separated, they missed each other, recorded the trivial daily life in detail, called "stones", and took them out to share when they got together. After the death of her daughter and husband, Yang Jiang was left alone to miss the past time of their three.

3.2. Discourse Structure under Multiple Narrations

The book *Three of Us* is divided into three parts, totaling 90,000 words. The first part is less than six hundred words. This part is like an introduction to the narrative behind the book. The second part is the essence of the book. Yang Jiang constantly changed the narrative perspectives, used the method of combining reality with virtuality, and relied on the dream to write the grief and sadness of farewell to the sick daughter and husband through the stream of consciousness. The third part is the life record of a their three, which occupies the most space. The time when they met in Yang Jiang's heart is most worthy of being recorded with strong ink.

3.2.1. Inclined Chapter Layout

The length of each part of *Three of Us* varies, the first part is the shortest, the second part is the second, and the third part is the longest. The first part is about a dream often made by the elderly at twilight. Yang Jiang looked for Qian Zhongshu in a dream, and finally led to the second part of the "Long Dream". The second part is fictitious in the whole article, and the whole length accounts for a quarter of the whole text. The third part is the real writing, and the entire length accounts for three-quarters of the full text, detailing the details of the warm and touching life of a family of three. The length of the three parts is one chapter longer than the other, and this kind of inclined chapter layout naturally brings the readers into the bleak mood created by the author. If *Three of us* is compared to a building, the third part is undoubtedly a solid, deep and stable foundation; the second part is a beautiful and dreamy decoration, but easy to fade, and ultimately not lasting; the first part is more like the smoke and mist on the roof, stirring up the emotions of homecoming and then quietly dispersed, giving people a kind of disappointment, like "smoke and waves on the river make people sad"[8]. Qian Yuan wanted to write a book to record the happy and warm past life of her family. After being seriously ill, she could only ask Yang Jiang to write on her behalf. After her daughter and husband died one after another, Yang Jiang did not start writing until

seven years later.

The first part is led by a dream, and the second part is a fictitious writing of reality with the help of a dream. Yang Jiang tries to alleviate the pain of facing the death of her beloved ones through a dream. Yang Jiang painted a strong and colorful stroke for the third part. Starting with the couple studying abroad in Oxford, she recounted the colorful life of their three for more than sixty years, so that the inclined focus of the entire article fell on this part. The emotional pain brought by the death of a beloved one is unforgettable. Yang Jiang hopes that the death of her daughter and husband is a complete dream, and when she wakes up, she can go home to meet them. "We'll only be parting in death from now on, not in life. "This is Qian Yanshu's promise to Yang Yan, but birth, old age, and death are issues in life that everyone must face. Accept the reality that self-healing is the best way to face death.

3.2.2. The Combination of Nonlinear Narrative and Linear Narrative

The second part is fictitious in the whole article, and it is easy for readers to have a sense of obscurity by writing reality in a virtual way. There are obviously two narrative lines interspersed in this section. The bright lines are losing Qian Zhongshu, finding Qian Zhongshu, and accompanying Qian Zhongshu. The dark line is writing the shrewd and capable characteristics of Qian Yuan and her illness. During her husband and daughter were seriously ill, Yang Jiang was like a liaison officer, passing messages from her daughter and husband back and forth. On the surface, Yang Jiang was visiting and accompanying Qian Zhongshu. In fact, through a series of dialogue descriptions and mental descriptions, Qian Yuan's personality and the seriousness of her condition were highlighted. Qian Yuan's condition is described by Yang Jiang through dreams, and she always cares about Qian Yuan. At the beginning of Qian Yuan's illness, Yang Jiang had a light dream. As Qian Yuan's condition worsened, Yang Jian's dream gradually turned into a tired dream and a heavy dream. Finally, her daughter's death was a nightmare for her. She told Qian Zhongshu the contents of the dream one by one. In this way, it is written about Yang Jiang's visit to Qian Zhongshu on the surface, which is actually a description of Qian Yuan's condition and her character. The two lines of light and dark intertwined to make the article less redundant, the author's miserable state of losing her beloved daughter jumped off the page.

Instead of narrating according to the timeline, Yang Jiang adopted a nonlinear narrative method that intersects reality and dreams to record the successive deaths of her daughter and husband. Different images are interspersed in dreams. Ancient post roads, inns, rivers, and small boats have appeared in the text, which is in line with the situation of Chinese traditional culture when people die from the Lethe River to another world. The ancient post road also implies Huangquan Road. Qian Zhongshu's boat did not have a helmsman and boatwoman, and the boat drifted forward every day. Yang Jiang could always find the "311" boat smoothly. The boat carrying Qian Zhongshu kept moving forward, which also heralded the passage of his life little by little. Yang Jiang walked alone on the ancient post road, insisting on visiting Qian Zhongshu every day, watching her husband's life pass away little by little, and she could do nothing. Her sadness turned into withered vines, cold willows, and withered trees. Yang Jiang used the scenery to express his grief and helplessness. The article mentioned many times the

changes of the willows all year round. The willows will sprout again in the coming year, but it is impossible for people to return.

The third part narrates the story according to the traditional time dimension. Yang Jiang starts from their couple's studying in Oxford in the order of narration. He tells the story that they know each other. This is a typical linear narrative. The years spent together studying in England and France were the beginning of the couple's acquaintance, and the birth of their daughter in Oxford, England, was the beginning of a happy life for their three. They first arrived in Oxford and learned to cook together. Qian Zhongshu insisted on making Yang Jiang breakfast every day in order to take care of her. For decades, it was enough to show their deep affection. People who have settled down are looking forward to having a child. Before the birth of Qian Yuan, Qian Zhongshu told Yang Jiang, "I don't want a son, I want a daughter-just one, like you." He achieved his wish. In the sixty years of Qian Yuan's life, she and her father are the best "buddies" and the most worried person is her mother. More than a year later, they returned to China and experienced the most difficult time in the country together. They fell into Shanghai, but they were still optimistic during the hard time. The ingenious narrative arrangement shows readers a family of three who are knowledgeable and kind, and also expresses concern between loved ones.

4. The Effect of Stream of Consciousness Technique in *Three of Us*

At present, there is no clear research on *Three of Us* to define it as the creation of stream of consciousness literature, but Yang Jiang has obvious traces of using stream of consciousness skills in the creation process, such as free association and space-time jump. The use of the stream of consciousness technique makes the narrative perspective of the whole work more diversified.

4.1. The Free Association of the Characters in *Three of Us*

In the form of stream of consciousness literature, Yang Jiang built the last time when she accompanied Qian Zhongshu and Qian Yuan into an illusory "long dream", and in the "long dream", he cast a "dream in dream" to bid farewell to her seriously ill daughter. Through the technique of free association, Yang Jiang cleverly shows her consciousness flow in *Three of Us*, which realizes the transformation of narrative space and better arranges the writing structure of her work. Human inner activities are not always rational and logical, it often breaks through the boundaries of space and time, from one thing to another, from this image to another image, showing the characteristics of seeing through the miles and thinking about thousands of miles. Yang Jiang was the only healthy people among the three, and she was already exhausted from travelling back and forth between her Sanlihe's apartment, her husband's ward and her daughter's ward by herself. The death of her daughter and husband became an unbearable past in her life. Seven years after the death of them, Yang Jiang began to create *Three of Us*. Her free association connected memories of the past.

At the beginning of "gathering on the ancient post road", Yang Jiang created a smoky and stuffy atmosphere for the

ancient post road, and put a layer of capricious coat on the ancient post road. Yang Jiang thought of a series of images such as long embankments, inns, waterways, willows, miscellaneous trees, weeds, tombs, etc., and then thought of the roots of old willows, the boat of helmsman and boatwoman. The pronunciation of "willow" is the same as "stay" in Chinese. The ancients generally used the image of "willow" in poetry to express their feelings of farewell to their friends. "Willow willows and wind trees, green and green sandwiched the imperial river", Wang Zhihuan used this to express his feelings of life and death. Yang Jiang adopted a series of images to imply that Qian Zhongshu's life was irretrievable. At the end of the second part, Yang Jiang mentioned "I walked and saw a man and a woman coming ... The woman was holding a springboard, and the man was holding a long bamboo pole ... They are about the helmsman and boatwoman I have never seen before". The disembarkation of them suggested that the boat was no longer in the original river. Qian Zhongshu's life has passed, and there is no way in the ancient post road to go further, only full of departing feelings. This kind of free association is generally established by a certain point of similarity or correlation between things. It is ostensibly in the form of free association of characters, but essentially depends on the writer's free association.

4.2. Space-time Jump of Consciousness in *Three of Us*

The theme in stream-of-consciousness novels is to describe the inner world or inner space of characters, that is, the consciousness of characters is the most worthy place to describe, and the outer world of real space is just something that can impress and stimulate people's consciousness [9]. Yang Jiang depicts the daily routine of a family of three and the bits and pieces of her farewell to her seriously ill daughter and husband in *Three of Us*, but the author shows the drift of character's consciousness in this journey of depicting her daughter and her husband receiving treatment for their serious illness. The author realized the transformation of dream through different dreams, such as "light dreams", "heavy dreams", "tired dreams", "nightmares", etc., and fully demonstrated the author's state of walking alone on the ancient post road. Yang Jiang walked alone on the road between home and hospital in real space, but her inner world was deeply extended and expanded. On the path of a fixed real space, the author shows different psychological spaces and realizes the stream of consciousness. "Entering the courtyard, I saw a memorial archway under the lights. It turned out that I walked into a cemetery. No, I had a nightmare. But when I turned around, I saw a small bungalow, and Yuan's little white hand was beckoning me. I entered Yuan's ward through the door and through the window. In the description of this text, the author constructs different spaces to represent the real space, such as "a memorial archway, a cemetery, a bungalow" due to the stream of consciousness.

Three of Us ostensible depicts what Yang Jiang saw and heard while walking on the ancient post road, but mainly describes her psychological activities such as the feeling and emotions of farewell to relatives, which is convenient to break through the limitations of real space. Yang Jiang thus shows her inner world, depicts the real scene of death, and gives readers the most real emotional experience. A small realistic space, through the free development of the author's thoughts, has constructed several different psychological spaces. Each

psychological space contains countless details, thoughts and fragments of impressions and feelings of reality. Yang Jiang was actually in Sanlihe's apartment, but her consciousness jumped to Yuan's ward and Yuan's in-law's house in Xishicao, followed by author's grief and sadness. "Yuan is gone, and I can't find her when I change my dream; I'm too tired and incapable of turning into a dream". Yang Jiang allows her consciousness to flow freely in *Three of Us* to pass back and forth in different real spaces, forming different psychological spaces to show her sorrow and sadness for the death of her beloved ones.

5. Conclusion

The theory of stream of consciousness originated at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the concept first appeared in the field of psychology. Freud's psychoanalysis theory shows that the realization of certain wishes that cannot be directly realized or difficult to achieve is the purpose of literary creation, and the stream of consciousness is gradually introduced into the field of literature. The narrative arrangement of stream-of-consciousness literature is generally not limited by time and space, and the structural arrangement of works is realized through the author's free association and space-time jump. In *Three of Us*, Yang Jiang skillfully adopts the stream of consciousness techniques such as free association and space-time jump to realize the diversification of the narrative of the article. Without being limited to a single space and a specific timeline, the author narrates the progression of the deterioration of her daughter's and husband's condition layer by layer. The successive illnesses of her husband and daughter undoubtedly dealt a huge blow to Yang Jiang. But in describing these last moments with her daughter and husband, she uses the most pristine language and plain tone to give readers the state of mind of a woman writer who faces the world with calmness and composure, making readers admire her and weep at the separation of a family of three.

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