



The Flight of Gemma Hardy

By Margot Livesey
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Introduction

The resonant story of a young woman's struggle to take charge of her own future, *The Flight of Gemma Hardy* is a modern take on a classic story 'Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*' that will fascinate readers of the Gothic original and fans of modern literary fiction alike, with its lyrical prose, robust characters, and abundant compassion. Set in early 1960s Scotland, this breakout novel from award-winning author Margot Livesey is a tale of determination and spirit that, like *The Three Weissmanns of Westport* and *A Thousand Acres*, spins an unforgettable new story from threads of our shared, still-living literary past.

Questions for Discussion

1. Did Gemma's name take on new meanings for you in the course of reading the novel? What about the other names she uses at various points?
2. In the opening chapters, Gemma's aunt is quite hardhearted, even cruel. Did your opinion of her change by the time you finished the novel?
3. How do you think the various landscapes that Gemma passes through help to change, or inform, her journey?
4. Gemma's uncle is a devout Christian. Do you think Gemma minds losing her faith? Do her childhood values continue to govern her actions as she matures into adulthood?
5. Throughout the novel there are various supernatural occurrences. What is their significance to the story and how do they impact Jane?
6. How do Gemma's relationships with the various orphans she cares for deepen your understanding of her?
7. Gemma is at the mercy of chance but she also takes charge of her life and makes certain crucial decisions. How do you feel about those decisions?
8. What role do animals and birds play in Gemma's life?
9. If you've read Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, are there places in *The Flight of Gemma Hardy* where you find yourself remembering Jane particularly vividly? How do those memories impact your reading of Gemma?
10. Did *The Flight of Gemma Hardy* make you think of other orphan stories beyond *Jane Eyre*? Why are orphan stories so endlessly appealing?

About the Author

Margot Livesey is the acclaimed author of the novels *The House on Fortune Street*, *Banishing Verona*, *Eva Moves the Furniture*, *The Missing World*, *Criminals*, and *Homework*. Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Vogue*, and *The Atlantic*, and she is the recipient of grants from both the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation. *The House on Fortune Street* won the 2009 L.L. Winship/PEN New England Award. Livesey was born in Scotland and grew up on the edge of the Highlands. She lives in the Boston area and is a Distinguished Writer-in-Residence at Emerson College.