



## Layers of Loss: Overt and Subtle Forms of Abandonment in Douglas Stuart's Shuggie Bain

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### ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the complex theme of loss and abandonment in Douglas Stuart's *Shuggie Bain*. The novel is set against the backdrop of 1980s Glasgow, grappling with economic decline and social disintegration. The novel paints a vivid portrait of overt abandonment, such as parental desertion, and subtle forms, like emotional neglect and societal indifference. Through the lens of young Shuggie Bain, Stuart intricately captures the impact of his father's absence and his mother Agnes's struggle with alcoholism. He illustrates how these direct forms of abandonment fracture the family's stability and Shuggie's childhood. Stuart goes beyond the obvious, layering his narrative with subtler portrayals of abandonment. He concentrates on the emotional withdrawal of community members numbed by poverty and the internal conflicts within Shuggie household. By focusing on these layered experiences, this paper investigates how Stuart illuminates the personal traumas of his characters. He also critiques broader social issues, including economic disenfranchisement, addiction, and the erosion of communal bonds. The analysis underscores how Stuart employs abandonment as a recurring motif to explore the disintegration of both individual lives and social fabric. This paper argues that the overlapping experiences of loss in *Shuggie Bain* offer a profound exploration of resilience and the human capacity to find hope amidst pervasive despair. It reveals the indelible marks that abandonment leaves on identity, relationships, and community

## INTRODUCTION

Douglas Stuart's *Shuggie Bain* is a poignant exploration of abandonment, rendered against the bleak backdrop of 1980s Glasgow. The novel chronicles the life of Shuggie Bain, a young boy whose experiences of loss and abandonment are both overt and subtle. This way he reflects broader societal issues and the intimate struggles of characters. Through vivid portrayal of Shuggie's turbulent childhood, Stuart sheds light on the multifaceted nature of abandonment that shape the protagonist's life and identity. The most immediate form of abandonment in the novel is seen through Shuggie's familial experiences. His father's departure and his mother Agnes's debilitating alcoholism leave Shuggie in a precarious position, both physically and emotionally. This direct abandonment disrupts his sense of security. It led him in a position where he must fend for himself in an environment marked by neglect and instability. Stuart "recounts how it comes about that the sixteen-year-old Shuggie ... finds himself abandoned first by his father, Shug Bain; then by his siblings, Catherine and Leek; then by his grandparents, Wullie and Lizzie; and, most dramatically, by his mother..." (Class, 2023: 649) Stuart's depiction of these overt losses highlight the effects of such desertion on Shuggie's well-being and development.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

However, *Shuggie Bain* extends beyond these explicit instances of abandonment to reveal subtler, yet equally impactful, forms of neglect. The novel portrays a community numbed by poverty and disillusionment. He portrays emotional detachment and societal indifference contributing to a pervasive sense of isolation. Shuggie's struggles are not only with the direct impact of his family's failures but also with the broader societal neglect that renders him deserted. This subtle form of abandonment manifests through the breakdown of social bonds, stigmatization of addiction, and the erosion of communal support systems.

## METHODOLOGY

Moreover, Shuggie's internal conflicts and his journey towards self-acceptance amidst a hostile environment further illustrate the layers of abandonment he endures. His struggle with his own identity, compounded by the societal pressures and expectations, adds another dimension to the theme of loss. Stuart intricately weaves these personal and societal layers to present a comprehensive view of how abandonment affects. This effect is visible not just in immediate familial relationships but also the broader social fabric. This paper aims to dissect these layers of abandonment in *Shuggie Bain*, examining how Stuart's narrative techniques and thematic concerns offer a critique of the socio-economic and cultural conditions of 1980s Glasgow. By exploring the intersections of personal loss and societal neglect, this study seeks to illuminate how Stuart's portrayal of abandonment serves as a commentary on the resilience of individuals in the face of profound adversity. Stuart shows the lasting impact of loss that shapes Shuggie's personal identity and community bonds.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Economic Loss and Social Abandonment in *Shuggie Bain*

One of the most prominent and overt layers of loss in *Shuggie Bain* is economic abandonment. The backdrop of the novel is Thatcher-era Glasgow, where the decline of heavy industry led to widespread unemployment and poverty. The Bain family, like many others, suffers from this economic decline. "The Thatcher Government has embraced a doctrinaire strategy for controlling inflation and a laissez-faire approach to the supply side economy without attempting to moderate the social impact of these policies." (Coutts, 1981: 81) The novel depicts a stark landscape where the loss of work leads to the loss of dignity and identity. By this way he reflects a broader societal abandonment by the government and the economic system. This abandonment is most visible in the lives of men who, having lost their jobs in traditional industries, also lose their place within the family and society. Jenkins states that, "in the early and mid-1990s, independent and official analyses concurred that the bottom 10 per cent had in fact experienced losses in real incomes (after housing costs) of up to 14 per cent under Thatcher." (1991: 514) During Thatcher's regime, "economic inequality and poverty in the United Kingdom rose dramatically to high levels that have remained one of the lasting legacies of Thatcherism, with far-reaching implications for social cohesion and political culture in Britain" (Felix, 2022: 513).

The 1980s in Glasgow, where *Shuggie Bain* is set, were characterized by economic policies under Margaret Thatcher's government. Her approach caused a significant shift in the socio-economic landscape of the United Kingdom. The decline of heavy industries such as shipbuilding, coal mining, and steel production led to a dramatic rise in unemployment. These industries had been the backbone of working-class communities for decades. As factories and mines closed, workers found themselves without jobs and, in many cases, without prospects for future employment. This shift did not just affect the workers' income; it dismantled entire communities. This led to tearing apart of the social fabric that had been woven around these industries. "Poverty is a beast and Stuart makes the reader feel it creep up behind you and put a cold wet hand on your shoulder. For the people who have experienced such abject poverty that hand is never far away and for others it may be not too far away." (Boyle, 2021) The impact of this economic decline is deeply felt by the Bain family. Agnes Bain, the central figure of the novel, struggles with alcoholism. Addiction in Glasgow can be seen as both a symptom and a consequence of this economic and social collapse. Her dependence on alcohol is exacerbated by the isolation and helplessness that come with being trapped in a poverty-stricken environment. She is caught in a cycle of despair, where economic abandonment contributes to her deteriorating mental health and addiction.

Moreover, the loss of economic stability and the ensuing social abandonment are portrayed through the lives of men who lose their jobs in traditional industries. For them, the loss of work is more than just the loss of a pay check—it is a loss of identity, pride, and their role within the family. For example, Shug Bain, Agnes's husband, represents the toxic masculinity that is exacerbated by economic disenfranchisement. His inability to cope with these

losses leads to his abandonment of his family. According to Liam Hess: Stuart paints a picture of a young man on society's margins with the eagle-eyed precision of someone who has not just lived it but truly absorbed it, regurgitating its grimmer details as he guides readers through the landscape of 1980s post-industrial Scotland and explains how Shuggie arrived here (2020).

This reflects a broader trend within the novel, where many men, unable to reconcile their diminished status and sense of worth. Thus they turn to destructive behaviour's or simply leave, thereby fracturing their families. This theme of economic loss leading to social abandonment is evident in the relationships between characters. In working-class Glasgow, traditionally, men were the breadwinners, their identities strongly tied to their ability to provide for their families. When this ability is stripped away due to mass unemployment, the men in *Shuggie Bain* often lose their sense of purpose. The novel poignantly illustrates how this loss reverberates through their lives. For instance, the relationship between Agnes and her son, Shuggie, is one marked by love but also by a profound sense of helplessness and frustration. Erikson refers to the concept of individual trauma which happens so unexpectedly that coping mechanisms – are not enough to handle it. He states: "individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defences so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively" (Erikson, 1991: 459) Shuggie's attempts to care for his mother in the face of her addiction highlight a role reversal, Stuart shows how child becomes the caregiver, underscoring the breakdown of traditional family structures caused by economic and social disintegration. Hope Lee contends "The idea of a child, parenting or supervising their parent is in and of itself, a painful trauma." (2021)

Stuart's depiction of Glasgow reveals a city grappling with the scars of deindustrialization. Stuart suggests that "During the industrialization period, the relentless extraction of minerals devastated the natural environment of Pithead." (Jialu, 2024: 154) Secondly, he delineates the impact of industrial decline on the community's economy, particularly the closure of the coal mines is shown disastrous. "The mine had been the heart of the community... and now there was nothing. The closures had killed off everything." (18) Abandoned factories and derelict buildings serve as constant reminders of what has been lost, not just in terms of economic output but also in terms of community spirit and cohesion. The Bain family's environment is one of bleakness and decay, a reflection of the internal desolation felt by its members. The novel's setting – both physical and psychological – embodies the sense of abandonment that pervades the lives of its characters. These urban landscapes mirror the characters' experiences of emptiness and loss, further reinforcing the novel's exploration of economic and social abandonment. The economic hardship faced by families after job losses were heart-wrenching. "Their wages were gone, and what jobs were left paid little." (23)

The children in the novel, especially Shuggie, experience the consequences of this abandonment in different but equally profound ways. Shuggie's experiences at school, where he is bullied for being different, underscore the isolation and otherness that children in such environments often face. "People

looked the other way, as if poverty was catching.” (221) They grow up in a world where opportunities are scarce and hope is a luxury. This bleak reality is compounded by the lack of positive role models, as many of the adults around them are grappling with their own demons of unemployment, addiction, and despair. In this way, Stuart presents a generational impact of economic and social abandonment, showing how the younger generation is often left to fend for itself amid the ruins of their parents’ lost dreams.

The novel explores the idea of escape as a response to this abandonment. Agnes frequently talks about moving to South Africa with Shug, clinging to a dream of a better life elsewhere, far removed from the harsh realities of Glasgow. “Agnes knew that there were no jobs left, not in this city, not for people like them.” (173) This longing for escape reflects a desperate desire to break free from the economic and social traps that have ensnared her. However, this dream remains just that – a dream. For many of the characters in *Shuggie Bain*, escape is not a viable option. They are bound by economic limitations, societal judgments, and, perhaps most painfully, by their own internalized feelings of worthlessness and defeat.

In conclusion, *Shuggie Bain* offers a profound exploration of economic loss and social abandonment. It presents a moving and unflinching portrayal of life in a Glasgow left devastated by the economic policies of the 1980s. Through the experiences of the Bain family and those around them, Stuart examines the multi-layered impacts of economic decline: from the loss of work and its resulting blow to personal and communal identities, to the devastating social abandonment that follows. The novel serves as a stark reminder of the long-term human cost of economic policies that prioritize profit over people, and the deep scars left on communities when the social fabric is torn apart. In doing so, it calls for a more compassionate and inclusive approach to addressing the legacies of economic and social abandonment.

### **The Absence of the Father**

In Douglas Stuart’s *Shuggie Bain*, the absence of Shuggie’s father, Leek, serves as a pivotal element of abandonment that profoundly impacts Shuggie’s life. Leek’s departure from the family home is not merely a physical absence but a deep emotional and psychological rupture that reverberates throughout the narrative. “Leek had left for good this time, leaving Shuggie alone to care for his mother. He had always been more absent than present, and now he was gone completely. Shuggie couldn’t understand why everyone left him.” (204) Stuart aims to make his readers understand the broader effects of paternal abandonment on Shuggie’s development and emotional well-being. Leek Bain’s departure represents the most immediate and visible form of abandonment experienced by Shuggie. The physical absence of Leek from the family home is a stark, tangible event that marks a significant shift in Shuggie’s world. It initiates a cascade of emotional and psychological challenges for Shuggie, underscoring the depth of the abandonment he endures. “Shuggie sat alone on the front step, waiting for a father who would never come back.” (140) From the outset, Leek’s departure is depicted as a traumatic rupture in Shuggie’s life. Leek’s exit forces Shuggie into a role that is incongruent with his age and development. The

sudden responsibility thrust upon Shuggie, as he is left to manage his mother's needs and navigate the growing instability in their household, is both overwhelming and unjust.

The emotional impact of Leek's departure is vividly portrayed through Shuggie's reactions and experiences. "Leek had gone without a word, and it seemed everyone in Shuggie's life had abandoned him one way or another." (301) Stuart captures the profound sense of loss and insecurity that Shuggie experiences in the wake of his father's exit. The text illustrates how Leek's departure undermines Shuggie's sense of stability and safety, leaving him vulnerable to the escalating challenges of his environment. Shuggie's struggle to cope with the absence of paternal support is evident in his heightened sense of anxiety, confusion, and isolation.

Leek's departure creates a domino effect of instability in Shuggie's life, exacerbating the challenges already present due to Agnes's struggle with alcoholism. The novel portrays how the absence of Leek compounds the difficulties faced by Shuggie and his mother, creating a cycle of neglect and instability that is difficult to escape. Without Leek's financial and emotional support, Agnes's condition deteriorates further, leading to a chaotic and unstable home environment. Shuggie is thrust into the role of caretaker, a responsibility that includes managing household chores, providing emotional support for his mother, and navigating an increasingly hostile environment. This role reversal is a direct consequence of Leek's abandonment, highlighting the way paternal desertion exacerbates existing familial challenges and creates new ones. The impact of Leek's departure is also reflected in the broader socio-economic context of the novel. The economic decline of 1980s Glasgow, coupled with the absence of a stable parental figure, intensifies the difficulties faced by Shuggie and Agnes. The novel portrays how the lack of a father's presence contributes to their marginalization and vulnerability in a society already struggling with economic and social upheaval.

One of the most significant consequences of Leek's absence is Shuggie's forced assumption of a caretaker role. "Everyone left, and in the end, it was just Shuggie and his mother, alone against the world." (318) This role reversal is a central theme in the novel and highlights the ways in which paternal abandonment disrupts the natural developmental trajectory of a child. Shuggie's experiences of taking on responsibilities that are far beyond his years underscore the emotional and psychological toll of Leek's departure. Shuggie's caretaker role is depicted through various aspects of his daily life. He is responsible for managing household tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, and looking after his mother. This premature assumption of adult responsibilities creates a profound sense of burden and stress for Shuggie, who is already grappling with his own emotional and developmental needs. The novel explores how these responsibilities affect Shuggie's sense of self and his emotional well-being.

Leek's absence serves as a catalyst for exploring the broader socio-economic and emotional challenges faced by Shuggie and Agnes. The novel portrays how paternal abandonment exacerbates existing difficulties, contributing to a cycle of neglect and instability that is difficult to break. "He felt

the weight of being left behind. It was like a heavy stone in his stomach that never went away.” (276) Stuart’s depiction of Leek’s departure highlights the complex interplay between personal and societal factors, revealing how familial desertion intersects with broader social issues. The impact of Leek’s abandonment is also reflected in Shuggie’s development and identity. The novel explores how Shuggie’s experiences of neglect and responsibility shape his sense of self and his relationships with others. Leek’s departure forces Shuggie to confront his own vulnerabilities and challenges, contributing to his growth and resilience in the face of adversity.

### **Agnes’s Struggle with Addiction**

In Douglas Stuart’s *Shuggie Bain*, Agnes Bain’s battle with alcoholism is a central theme that profoundly influences the narrative and deeply impacts her son Shuggie. Agnes’s struggle with addiction introduces a multifaceted layer of overt abandonment that is both physical and emotional, leaving Shuggie to grapple with the consequences of his mother’s inability to provide a stable and nurturing environment. “Shuggie watched his mother fade into herself, abandoning him slowly each day to the drink.” (259) Agnes’s alcoholism manifests in various ways that disrupt the stability of their home and significantly affect Shuggie’s daily life. Stuart depicts Agnes’s behaviour with raw realism, illustrating how her addiction leads to unpredictable and erratic conduct that undermines her ability to function as a reliable caregiver. This erratic behaviour creates an atmosphere of chaos and uncertainty, leaving Shuggie to navigate a world where his mother’s actions are driven more by her addiction than by any sense of responsibility or care. “Agnes’s drinking had started small, a little nip at night to help her sleep... But the nights grew longer, and soon the days blurred into the bottle.” (77)

The novel vividly captures the physical and emotional manifestations of Agnes’s alcoholism. Her behaviour often oscillates between extreme highs and lows, creating a volatile environment that leaves Shuggie in a constant state of anxiety. “The drink took her slowly, bit by bit, until there was nothing left of the proud woman she had once been.” (142) Stuart illustrates how Agnes’s addiction disrupts daily routines and responsibilities, leading to a lack of consistency and reliability in the home. Shuggie is left to contend with the consequences of his mother’s behaviour, which includes managing the household and dealing with the fallout of Agnes’s unstable actions. This portrayal underscores the direct impact of Agnes’s addiction on Shuggie’s sense of security and stability.

As Agnes’s addiction worsens, her ability to attend to Shuggie’s basic needs deteriorates significantly. Stuart’s depiction of this neglect is detailed and poignant, highlighting the practical implications of Agnes’s inability to provide for her child. The novel presents scenes where Shuggie’s needs are consistently overlooked, including his lack of proper nourishment, inadequate hygiene, and general neglect of his emotional well-being. Stuart’s portrayal of Shuggie’s experiences of neglect serves as a powerful commentary on the impact of addiction on caregiving and the resulting consequences for a child’s development. One vivid example is Shuggie’s frequent hunger and unkempt appearance, which are direct outcomes of Agnes’s failure to manage the

household effectively. Stuart describes how Shuggie often goes without meals and basic necessities, reflecting the severe impact of Agnes's addiction on his daily life. This neglect is not merely a matter of physical deprivation but also extends to emotional neglect, as Shuggie is left without the support and care that he needs to thrive.

The impact of Agnes's addiction is further highlighted through the deterioration of the home environment. Stuart uses vivid imagery to depict the physical decline of their living space, reflecting the broader emotional and psychological instability within the household. "The drink had taken her beauty, her health, and now it was taking her mind." (279) As Agnes's addiction progresses, the home becomes increasingly unkempt and disordered, mirroring the decline in Agnes's own condition and the resulting instability in Shuggie's life. "She had drunk her life away, and now there was nothing left except the drink." (325) The physical decay of the home serves as a tangible manifestation of the emotional and psychological turmoil that pervades their lives. Stuart describes the house in terms of neglect and disarray, with piles of dirty laundry, uncleaned dishes, and an overall sense of disorder. This physical decline contributes to Shuggie's sense of abandonment and insecurity, as he is forced to navigate a chaotic and unmanageable environment.

Shuggie's emotional and psychological response to his mother's addiction is a central theme in the novel, characterized by feelings of guilt, responsibility, and isolation. The premature assumption of adult roles forces Shuggie to confront complex emotions and challenges that are far beyond his years. Stuart explores Shuggie's internal conflict, capturing the impact of his mother's condition on his sense of self and emotional development. Shuggie's role as a caretaker creates a profound sense of guilt and responsibility, as he grapples with the demands placed upon him by Agnes's addiction. Stuart depicts Shuggie's struggle to balance his own needs with the responsibilities he has assumed, highlighting the psychological burden of his situation. The novel explores Shuggie's feelings of inadequacy and self-blame, emphasizing how his mother's condition shapes his emotional landscape. Additionally, Shuggie's isolation is compounded by the lack of a stable support system and the emotional distance between him and Agnes. This isolation contributes to Shuggie's overall sense of abandonment and distress, reinforcing the psychological impact of his mother's addiction.

Agnes's addiction also has broader implications that extend beyond the immediate family dynamic, addressing themes of societal stigma and marginalization. Stuart portrays the social isolation and shame associated with alcoholism, highlighting how societal attitudes contribute to the sense of abandonment experienced by Shuggie and Agnes. The stigma surrounding addiction exacerbates their difficulties, reinforcing feelings of shame and alienation. Despite these challenges, the novel also explores themes of resilience and coping. Stuart highlights Shuggie's capacity to endure and adapt amidst adversity, portraying his determination to find moments of solace and stability despite the chaos of his environment. Agnes's struggle with addiction serves as a central theme in Shuggie's experience of abandonment, illustrating the

profound effects of a parent's failure to fulfil their caregiving role. The novel provides a nuanced exploration of resilience in the face of adversity.

In *Shuggie Bain*, Agnes Bain's struggle with alcoholism introduces a critical layer of overt abandonment that profoundly impacts Shuggie's life. Through a detailed portrayal of Agnes's addiction, Stuart captures the ways in which her condition exacerbates Shuggie's experience of neglect and abandonment. The novel explores the manifestations of Agnes's addiction, the practical implications of her neglect, the deterioration of the home environment, and Shuggie's emotional and psychological response. Additionally, the broader implications of societal stigma and resilience are addressed, providing a comprehensive examination of the effects of addiction on Shuggie and his development. Agnes's battle with alcoholism serves as a central theme in the novel, illustrating the profound impact of a parent's failure to fulfil their caregiving role and the complex dynamics of resilience in the face of adversity.

### **Community Indifference**

In *Shuggie Bain*, Douglas Stuart paints a harrowing portrait of Glasgow, a city ravaged by economic decline and social fragmentation. This backdrop of decay and destitution sets the stage for an exploration of societal indifference, a theme that resonates deeply throughout the novel. Stuart's depiction of a community that is physically present but emotionally detached highlights not only the neglect from Shuggie Bain's own family but also the broader, pervasive apathy that defines the lives of those suffering from poverty and addiction. This indifference is central to understanding the novel's portrayal of isolation and neglect, demonstrating how economic hardship and social stigmatization contribute to a lack of communal support, further isolating individuals like Shuggie and his mother, Agnes.

The setting of *Shuggie Bain* is crucial to its exploration of community indifference. Stuart situates the narrative in Glasgow during a time of significant economic downturn. The city, once a bustling industrial hub, is now a landscape of economic despair. Industrial decline has left a trail of unemployment and poverty, and the social infrastructure that once supported the working class has deteriorated. As neighborhoods fall into decay and social services are stripped away, the fabric of the community begins to fray. The residents, struggling to cope with their own economic hardships, become increasingly self-focused. This preoccupation with personal survival leads to a general erosion of communal bonds, making it less likely that individuals will offer support to those in need. In this environment, the social connections that once provided a safety net are weakened, contributing to a profound sense of isolation among the most vulnerable.

Economic decline is closely intertwined with the stigmatization of poverty and addiction in the novel. Stuart portrays Shuggie and Agnes as not only victims of economic collapse but also subjects of societal scorn. "They were left to rot in their high-rises, forgotten by everyone." (102) Agnes's battle with alcoholism is a focal point of this stigma. Her addiction is not only a personal struggle but also a source of deep-seated shame and judgment from those around her. The community's reaction to Agnes's condition is marked by a harsh, scornful

detachment rather than empathy or support. This stigmatization extends to Shuggie, who faces the compounded burden of being associated with his mother's addiction. "The neighbours all knew about Agnes's drinking, but nobody ever said a word." (191) The novel illustrates how this stigma isolates both Agnes and Shuggie, rendering them invisible and further alienating them from a society that might otherwise offer assistance. This dynamic underscores a key aspect of community indifference: the tendency to marginalize and ignore those who are already struggling with societal stigma.

The novel's depiction of community indifference is also evident in the lack of intervention or assistance from neighbours. Despite being aware of Shuggie and Agnes's struggles, the community often chooses to remain passive. This passivity is not just a background detail but an active force contributing to the Bain family's suffering. For instance, when Agnes is visibly struggling with her addiction, and Shuggie is left to navigate a chaotic and often hostile environment on his own, the lack of outreach from those around them is stark. The neighbours, who might have offered support or at least a modicum of kindness, instead opt to remain uninvolved. "Shuggie had learned that no one was coming to save them. The neighbours, the city, even God – it was all the same. They were on their own." (332) This absence of communal support reflects a societal attitude that prioritizes personal survival over collective responsibility. The broader sense of neglect is thus perpetuated by a community that fails to act, reinforcing the isolation experienced by Shuggie and his mother.

Emotional detachment is another significant aspect of community indifference explored in the novel. The socioeconomic conditions in Glasgow lead to a fragmentation of social bonds, resulting in a pervasive sense of isolation. The general apathy from those around Shuggie and Agnes manifests as emotional detachment. Shuggie's experiences are characterized by profound loneliness, exacerbated by a lack of meaningful connections with others. This emotional detachment is a direct consequence of the socioeconomic collapse and the resulting breakdown in community cohesion. The community's unwillingness to engage with Shuggie and his mother highlights a broader societal issue where personal struggles are met with indifference rather than support. This detachment creates a cycle of isolation and neglect, further compounding the difficulties faced by individuals in such dire circumstances. Stuart's portrayal of community indifference extends beyond the immediate experiences of Shuggie and Agnes to critique broader societal attitudes towards poverty and addiction. "They had long stopped caring." (295) The novel suggests that this indifference is not merely a reflection of individual failings but a systemic issue rooted in societal mechanisms that perpetuate neglect. By depicting a community that is emotionally detached and unwilling to offer support, Stuart critiques the societal structures that allow such neglect to persist.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*Shuggie Bain* intricately examines abandonment in its overt and subtle forms, demonstrating how loss manifests on personal, familial, and societal levels. At the heart of the novel is Agnes Bain, whose descent into alcoholism isolates her from her family and community, making her both the victim and

agent of abandonment? Her children, particularly Shuggie, suffer the consequences of her addiction, experiencing neglect and emotional detachment even in moments of love. Agnes's gradual alienation—from her husband, neighbors, and eventually herself—highlights the devastating effects of addiction and the cyclical nature of loss. However, beyond these explicit portrayals of abandonment, Stuart also examines its quieter, more insidious forms. Shuggie, in his unwavering devotion to his mother, is left emotionally stranded, caught between hope and despair. His difference—both in his effeminate mannerisms and his struggles to fit into his harsh environment—further isolates him. The abandonment he endures is not always physical but is deeply psychological, as he is repeatedly failed by those meant to care for him. His loneliness is exacerbated by a society that neglects its most vulnerable, offering little support for the impoverished and struggling. *Shuggie Bain* is a meditation on resilience amid relentless loss. Stuart does not offer easy resolutions; instead, he presents a world where abandonment is woven into the fabric of daily life, yet love persists in fractured, imperfect ways. Shuggie's story is one of survival; where the weight of loss shapes but does not entirely define him. By depicting abandonment in both its explicit and subtle forms, Stuart forces readers to confront the enduring impact of loss, while also recognizing the small yet significant ways in which love, however fragile, continues to exist.

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